Understanding perceptions of social relationships with children among pedohebephilic

individuals: A two-part study

By
Desiree Lynn Elchuk

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Approved: Dr. Skye Stephens
              Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Marguerite Ternes
              Internal Examiner

Approved: Dr. Ian McPhail
              External Examiner

Approved: Dr. Robin Wilson
              External Examiner

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Abstract

The current thesis comprises two studies examining social relationships with children among pedohebephilic individuals. Study one quantitatively examined mediators (i.e., internalized stigma, loneliness, sexual fantasies) of the association between social relationships with children, suicide, and a history sexual offending. Study two qualitatively explored reasons pedohebephilic individuals seek social relationships with children, and how these social relationships are conceptualized. Study one results did not demonstrate either partial or full mediation. Despite this, the length of social relationships with children was associated with a history of sexual offending. Results from qualitative study two noted four themes that highlighted concerns of dynamic changes, emotional congruence with children, challenges and risk of relationships with children, and the role of social networks. Findings suggest emotional congruence with children, social isolation from adults, and one's social network are likely to be contributing factors for pedohebephilic individuals developing social connections with children.

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Chapter 1 – Introductory Chapter

Introduction

Research examining pedohebephilic individuals (individuals with sexual interest in prepubescent and/or pubescent children; Blanchard et al., 2009; McPhail et al., 2018) has recently adopted a two-pronged approach to not only prevent child sexual abuse but to gain a better understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of this population. The present thesis is composed of two studies with a focus on examining social relationships with children among pedohebephilic individuals. These studies build upon the author's honours thesis and contribute to the existing literature of child sexual abuse prevention and the wellbeing of pedohebephilic individuals. Study one (Chapter 2) is a quantitative study that examines mediators of the association between (1) social relationships with children and (2) length of friendships with children and suicidality and history sexual offending against children. Study one used data collected during the author's honours thesis and applies more complex statistical analyses to examine the largely unaddressed topic of social relationships with children among pedohebephilic individuals. Study two (Chapter 3) adopts a qualitative approach to explore (1) the reasons pedohebephilic individuals seek social relationships with children and (2) how pedohebephilic individuals conceptualize their social relationships with children. These studies have important implications for those who provide clinical services to pedohebephilic individuals. Pedohebephilic individuals may seek mental health services and they may disclose their attraction to children and perceived friendships with children, a phenomenon that is not well researched or understood. The current thesis aims to offer treatment providers a better understanding of these complex social relationships which can in turn provide potential treatment

targets. For instance, if social relationships with children are known to be associated with experiences of suicidality or a history of sexual offending, it would suggest that targeting these concerns in treatment is highly relevant.

Socio-Emotional Features of Pedohebephilic Individuals

Although discussions of pedohebephilia often focus on sexual interest it is important to highlight that sexual interest is multidimensional. Acknowledgement of sexual interest as a multidimensional construct has been around for some time and has been discussed regarding other aspects of human sexuality. For example, Klein and colleagues (1985) developed the "Sexual Orientation Grid" which consists of a series of questions regarding individuals' preferences of attractions, behaviours, fantasies, as well as emotional and social preferences for same and opposite-sex partners. Researchers have expanded on such work among sexual minorities further solidifying sexuality as a multidimensional construct. A study by Savin-Williams (1998) examining sexual-identity development noted participants shared differences between being "sexually satisfied" and "emotionally satisfied". Diamond (2003) found that orientation, romantic love, and sexual desire do not always follow presumed trends (i.e., heterosexual individuals only fall in love with opposite sex individuals) and differences between the processes of sexual desire and affectional bonding are likely to account for this. Others have noted discrepancies between sexual fantasies and sexual behaviour. For instance, researchers examining the prevalence of bondage-discipline-sado-masochism (BDSM) fantasies vs. activities within a general sample of Belgians ($N = 1{,}027$), 22% ($n = 226$) disclosed having fantasies involving BDSM activities but only 12.5% ($n = 128$) indicated engaging in BDSM activities regularly (Holvoet et al., 2017). Thus, it has been acknowledged aspects of sexuality can extend beyond fantasies and behaviour and that sexual attraction is multidimensional.

In an attempt to capture the multidimensionality of sexual attraction to children and preferences to children over adults, the "Klein Sexual Orientation Grid" was adapted for use among pedohebephilic individuals (Stephens & McPhail, 2021). Stephens and McPhail (2021) applied this adapted version of the "Klein Sexual Orientation Grid", known as the "Erotic Age Orientation Grid", to a community sample of pedohebephilic individuals. This modified version examines past, present, and ideal sexual attraction, behaviours, and fantasies pertaining to both adults and children among individuals with sexual interest in children. Results showed most participants, 81% (n = 184), indicated having strictly child-oriented sexual fantasies, but noted they only engaged in adult-oriented sexual behaviours (90.7%, n = 88). A small proportion of the study sample, 7.2% (n = 7), indicated engaging in strictly child-oriented sexual behaviour (specifically, the question asked only about detected sexual contact). When participants were asked to indicate their ideal sexual behaviour 46.7% (n = 98) participants noted child-oriented sexual behaviour as their ideal. Furthermore, when participants were asked to indicate their current emotional attraction, 58% (n = 129) noted being strictly emotionally attracted to children and 11% (n = 24) preferred social interactions with children over those with other adults. These findings emphasize the importance of considering non-sexual aspects of sexual interest in children as they pertain to social-emotional interest.

Similarly, other researchers have examined social-emotional aspects among males with pedohebephilic interests. One study found that among a sample of 306 participants 72% (n = 217) reported falling in love with a child under the age of 14 (Martjin et al., 2020). Furthermore, participants who indicated having fallen in love with a child also reported experiencing a sense of deep attachment to children (Martijn et al., 2020). Martjin and colleagues (2020) flagged this as particularly significant given this type of deep attachment is typically formed in mutual, long-

term adult romantic relationships. Similar findings were noted in a qualitative study by Houtepen et al. (2016) which found that among their 15 participants, 66% (*n* = 10) discussed experiencing both sexual and romantic feelings towards children. The findings of these abovementioned studies strongly suggest that feelings experienced by pedohebephilic individuals progress far beyond basic sexual attraction (Martijn et al., 2020; Stephens & McPhail, 2021). To gain a better understanding of pedohebephilic individuals more research is needed to further explore the complex feelings and interactions with children.

Emotional Congruence with Children

A concept that is similarly linked with social-emotional aspects of sexual interest among pedohebephilic individuals is the concept of emotional congruence with children (ECWC). ECWC is defined as "an exaggerated emotional and cognitive affiliation with children and is evidenced by indicators such as enjoying spending leisure time with children, engaging in children's activities, possessing children's recreational equipment, feeling childlike, and perceiving relationships with children as intimate and reciprocal" (Hermann et al., 2017; p.2). The concept of ECWC was first introduced by Finkelhor (1984) in the context of child sexual abuse. Finkelhor (1984) suggests that for some who sexually offend against children, they experience 'blockage' of intimate relationships with other adults and are therefore more likely to seek social relationships with children. Others have defined ECWC as having four main components: (1) identifying emotionally with children, (2) feeling more emotionally connected to children than adults, (3) considering children as friends, and (4) feeling child-like (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004; Wilson, 1999). ECWC has been identified as a central element for understanding sexual offending against children in the forensic literature (Paquette & McPhail, 2020) as well as a psychologically meaningful risk factor for sexual offending against children

among men who have previously sexually offended (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; McPhail et al., 2013).

One important consideration when discussing ECWC is that moderate levels are considered normal, and even advantageous, particularly among parents and child caretakers; however, ECWC may become problematic when it coincides with emotional isolation from adults (Beckett et al., 1994). Other researchers have noted similar findings that suggest these atypical feelings towards children may be a result of a deficiency in intimacy with adults (Finkelhor, 1984; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Marshall, 1989) also referred to as "distorted intimacy balance" (Thorton, 2002). Given the lack of intimacy and/or social connection with adults, coupled with experiences of loneliness (Elchuk et al., 2022; Jahnke et al., 2015), pedohebephilic individuals may seek intimacy by inappropriate means such as exploring social relationships among children (Fernandez et al., 2012; Marshall, 1989, 1998). Indeed, research examining ECWC demonstrates a strong association between ECWC and pedophilia, other paraphilias, and sexual offence history (Hermann et al., 2017; McPhail et al., 2013, 2014, 2018).

ECWC has been identified within forensic samples but its presence within community samples of those with pedohebephilia is still relatively unknown (Konrad et al., 2018). Given what we know from the forensic literature, in that ECWC is a salient experience among justice involved pedohebephilic individuals, it is anticipated that pedohebephilic individuals in the community also experience ECWC to some degree and therefore may be more likely to seek social relationships and friendships with children (Elchuk, 2019; Konrad et al., 2018; McPhail et al., 2013). Coupled with noted difficulties in forming and continuing social relationships with

other adults, and increased experiences of loneliness, these social relationships and friendships with children can be conceptualized as problematic (Beckett et al., 1994; McPhail et al., 2013).

Social Interaction and Social Relationships with Children

The concept of seeking social relationships with children among pedohebephilic individuals has only recently been examined tangentially through the lens of ECWC (Wilson, 1999); however, fewer studies have directly examined these interactions with children. Most of these studies have been primarily qualitative in nature (Geradt et al., 2018; Houtpen et al., 2016; Walton & Duff, 2017), with only one quantitative study focused on this concept (Elchuk, 2019). These studies are briefly reviewed below.

Houtepen and colleagues (2016) interviewed a sample of 15 pedohebephilic individuals with the goal of providing insight into pedophilic attraction as well as potential risks and/or protective factors to child sexual offending. Most participants in the study ($n = 10$) indicated having close relationships with children, such as a friendship or mentorship, that resulted in a highly rewarding experience as it provided them with the opportunity to make children happy. Forty percent of participants in their study reported they were not socially involved with children and as a result, experienced increased fixation on their sexual attraction to children.

Another qualitative study broadly examined the lived experiences of a forensic population of pedohebephilic individuals and reported interesting findings regarding feelings towards social contact with children (Walton & Duff, 2017). A particularly noteworthy finding among two of the participants indicated what can be termed a constant "internal battle" in which they described conflicting feelings of simultaneously wanting and opposing sexual contact with children. Both participants also noted that avoiding children and potential triggers proved to be counterproductive such that when the participants actively avoided social interactions with

children they experienced increased sexual urges and thoughts. It is possible this fixation on sexual thoughts and urges could potentially lead to an increased desire to sexually offend. This finding, coupled with the fact that most participants expressed concerns about lack of support from professional services (i.e., mental health treatment providers), is worrying given our understanding of the already shallow pool of social support services among pedohebephilic individuals (Walton & Duff, 2017).

Geradt and colleagues (2018) also examined social contact with children as well as beliefs surrounding sexual contact with children within a community sample of pedohebephilic individuals. Similar to the findings of Walton and Duff (2017), results indicated that both social and physical contact with children were significantly associated with fewer legitimizing beliefs surrounding sexual contact with children. Perhaps what is even more interesting is the significant findings persisted after controlling for social desirability (Geradt et al., 2018). The authors suggest a possible explanation for this finding is that pedohebephilic individuals who are in frequent social contact with children may be significantly more aware of "warning signals" from children (e.g., a worried look in response to an action or a failure to react in a desirable way towards an action), thus reminding them that children should be respected and not harmed. Unsurprisingly, participants in the study noted that frequent social and physical interactions with children were related to less social fears, higher self-esteem, and decreased levels of loneliness (Geradt et al., 2018). It is possible this finding may be linked with pedohebephilic individuals who experience high levels of ECWC in that they feel more comfortable in the presence of children because they themselves are more childlike; however, further research is required to investigate this concept and how it relates to social relationships with children.

Considering what is known regarding the lack of social supports among this population (Cantor & McPhail, 2016), coupled with experiences of internalized stigma, loneliness, and suicidal ideation (Elchuk et al., 2022), pedohebephilic individuals may engage in maladaptive methods of seeking intimacy by inappropriate means. That is, pedohebephilic individuals may seek children to fulfill social and emotional needs that are not met in their adult social relationships (Elchuk, 2019). The author's honours thesis examined perceived friendships with children among pedohebephilic individuals in a sample of 110 participants with sexual interest in children (Elchuk, 2019). Among this sample 35% indicated there was at least one child in their life they considered to be their friend. Of greatest relevance to the present thesis was that social relationships with children (defined as a friendship with a child or children in which an adult is in regular contact and/or regularly spends time with) were negatively correlated with suicidality. It is possible the participants engaging in such social relationships are *perceiving* social support from their interactions with children, and therefore the support is not stemming from contact with children, rather it is stemming from the individual's perception of the social interaction. Moreover, it is possible the social relationships with children are fulfilling the social needs (i.e., psychological needs such as intimate relationships and friendships; McLeod, 2007) of pedohebephilic individuals, thereby decreasing feelings of suicidality; however, such relationships may be inappropriate and should not be encouraged. Furthermore, while having social relationships with children was not associated with a history of detected sexual offending against children, the amount of time spent in social contact with children was significantly correlated with having a history of child sexual offending (Elchuk, 2019). These findings suggest the possibility that frequent social contact with children may lead to increased opportunity to offend, perhaps by exacerbating sexual urges and thoughts (Walton & Duff, 2017). The

connection between social relationships with children and suicidality and history of sexual

offending is the focus of the first study in this thesis.

Chapter 2 – Study 1

Present Study

Study 1 is an extension of the author's honours thesis that, in part, examined social relationships with children. The present study uses a larger sample size than was available at the time of the honours thesis and is unique in aiming to better understand the association between social relationships with children and suicidality as well as history of sexual offending against children (herein referred to as "history of sexual offending") via several different mediation models. Specifically, this study looked at whether the constructs: internalized stigma, loneliness, and sexual fantasies mediate the association between social relationships with children, and two outcome variables (i.e., suicidality and history of sexual offending; see Figures 1 and 2). In addition to these mediation analyses, exploratory data examining ECWC are presented. Both proposed outcome variables (i.e., suicidality and history of sexual offending) have been examined in previous research among pedohebephilic individuals, are known contributors to individual wellbeing, and are highly relevant treatment targets.

Suicidality. When compared with the general population, pedohebephilic individuals are known to experience significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation (Cohen et al., 2019; Walter & Pridmore, 2010). Unsurprisingly, suicidality is highly correlated with experiences of both loneliness and internalized stigma (Elchuk et al., 2022). Previous studies have highlighted the importance of social relationships and support from family and friends in reducing experiences of suicidality, loneliness, and internalized stigma among pedohebephilic individuals (Elchuk et al., 2022). Still, such individuals are more likely to encounter difficulties forming and maintaining friendships with other adults because of their attraction to children and are therefore less likely to benefit from the protective factors that come with positive adult social relationships

(Cantor & McPhail, 2016). More research is needed to better understand contributing factors to these elevated experiences of suicidal ideation so as to inform and improve treatment practices.

   History of Sexual Offending. To better understand pedohebephilic individuals in the community, much of the early research in this area examined differences between those who have previously sexually offended against children and those who have not sexually offended. By better understanding the differences among those who do and do not offend mental health services and treatment programs can better support those who wish to remain offence-free (Cantor & McPhail, 2016). A study by Cohen and colleagues (2018) compared two community samples of individuals who self-identified as being sexually attracted to children; one group had successfully refrained from committing a sexual offence while the other had not. Significant differences were noted between the groups, such that those with a history of sexual offending were typically older than those who did not offend, which potentially suggests a longer duration of attraction to children. Therefore, it is possible that time may play an important role in understanding sexual offending against children. This concept of time could be extended to interactions with children such that the more time spent with children in a social setting (i.e., length of friendships with children) could be associated with sexual offending against children.

   Within the same study, researchers noted participants with a history of offending expressed difficulty managing their attraction compared to non-offenders (Cohen et al., 2018). The term "difficulty managing attraction" included managing sexual urges. Although managing sexual urges was not clearly defined it arguably has the potential to include sexual fantasies involving children and trouble managing these fantasies. Thus, it is likely sexual fantasies involving children are associated with history of sexual offending.

Other researchers suggest possible markers for emotional congruence with children could be related to offence history, such as identifying with children and seeking employment in positions with children (Bailey et al., 2016). For example, Bailey et al. (2016) suggests men who worked with children were more likely to have a history of sexual offending, and while the cause of this is unclear, some suggest more frequent contact with children (e.g., sustained social relationships) may lead to increased temptation and opportunity to sexually offend. Researchers have suggested those who have frequent contact with children by means of employment or volunteer work may experience increased temptation or opportunity to commit a sexual offence against children (Bailey et al., 2016; Walton & Duff, 2017). Similar findings were noted in the author's honours thesis such that the number of social contacts with children participants perceived as friends was significantly correlated with a history of sexual offending (Elchuk, 2019).

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 1 and the current literature examining suicidality and history of sexual offending among pedohebephilic individuals, it is hypothesized that the association between social relationships with children, including length of social relationships with children, and suicidality and history of sexual offending is mediated by the following constructs: internalized stigma, loneliness, and sexual fantasies involving children (see Figure 1 and 2).

Internalized Stigma. Despite the understanding that many pedohebephilic individuals live an offence-free life, society tends to hold more stigmatizing attitudes towards this population than other highly stigmatized groups (see Boysen et al., 2020;; Imhoff et al., 2015; Lehmann et al., 2021). In recent years, researchers have applied sexual minority stress theories (see Meyer 1995; 2003) to pedohebephilic individuals. In particular, theories of minority stress and internalized stigma have been applied to pedohebephilic individuals. Internalized stigma is a

term that encompasses several facets such as, the perception of devaluation, subjective experiences of shame, concealment, and withdrawal due to the acceptance or endorsement of these negative stereotypes (Corrigan, 1998; Elchuk et al., 2022; Lievesley et al., 2020; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). Sexual minorities who experience internalized stigma are at higher risk to experience decreased mental health (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010) and self-injurious behaviours (Williamson, 2000). Researchers have found similar associations between internalized stigma and negative mental health outcomes among pedohebephilic individuals (Cohen et al., 2018; Elchuk et al., 2022). In fact, some researchers suggest the stigmatization of pedohebephilic individuals may lead to an increased risk of offending, especially when the stigma is internalized (Cantor & McPhail, 2016).

Based on the strong association between internalized stigma and suicidality, as well as the potential for societal stigma and disapproval of adult-child friendships, it is hypothesized that among those with social relationships with children, internalized stigma mediates the association between social relationships with children and both suicidality and history of offending.

Loneliness. In addition, or sometimes because of, experiences of internalized stigma, pedohebephilic individuals tend to feel high levels of loneliness (Elchuk et al., 2022; Jahnke, Schmidt, et al., 2015; Konrad et al., 2017; Lievesley et al., 2020). A recent study examined a community sample of men with sexual interest in children ($n = 104$) and noted significant experiences of distress, loneliness, and social isolation owing to their sexual interest in children (Jahnke et al., 2015). Similarly, another study found that the incidence of loneliness experienced by pedohebephilic individuals living in the community was markedly higher than several other populations which have been found to experience high levels of loneliness (Elchuk et al., 2022). Given that loneliness was found to be a successful mediator between perceived social support

from adults and suicidality (Elchuk et al., 2022), further research examining how loneliness mediates the association between social relationships with children is warranted.

The association between loneliness and history of sexually offending against children is also a pathway of interest. Garlick and colleagues (1995) examined differences in experiences of loneliness among individuals who have sexually offended against children compared to those who have not offended. Individuals who offended noted experiencing higher levels of loneliness; however, it is unclear whether loneliness was a contributing factor to the offending or simply a result of the offending.

As a result of the studies reviewed, it is hypothesized that social relationships with children, as well as increased length of friendships with children, are associated with suicidality and history of sexual offending via the experience of loneliness.

Sexual Fantasies Involving Children. The final proposed mediator is sexual fantasies involving children. Sexual fantasies are acknowledged as a common and important element of human sexuality (Joyal et al., 2015), which may prove difficult for pedohebephilic individuals given the stigma surrounding their attraction (Lievesley et al., 2023). Whether or not sexual fantasies are viewed as problematic is typically dependent on criteria such as content, frequency, presence of distress, and/or risk of harming others (American Psychological Association, 2022).

Some researchers have hypothesized that such fantasies may act as a "disinhibitor", such that, engaging in deviant sexual fantasies may "normalize" behaviour being fantasized which can decrease inhibitions and increase the possibility of committing a sexual offence (Gee et al., 2004). Similarly, Bartels and Gannon (2011) suggest sexual fantasies involving children can increase the risk of sexual offending against children. Conversely, others believe pedohebephilic individuals who engage in sexual fantasies involving children may not be more likely to commit

a sexual offence against a child. Recent research found that engaging in sexual fantasies was not significantly correlated with deviant sexual behaviours (Stoléru et al., 2020). Similarly, a study by Willis and Bartels (2022) reported the association between sexual fantasies and enacting on these fantasies are reliant on several factors, such as the plausibility of enacting the fantasy-related behaviour. Given that sexual contact with children is illegal, pedohebephilic individuals engaging in sexual fantasies involving children may perceive their fantasy-related behaviour as less plausible and therefore the illegality of the fantasy may act as an "inhibitor" to acting out such fantasies (Lievesley et al., 2023; Willis & Bartels, 2022). This suggests that not all individuals who engage in sexual fantasies involving children have a propensity to offend and there are likely several other factors contributing to this association.

Regardless, given the uncertainty of whether engaging in sexual fantasies involving children is associated with a history of sexual offending, more research is needed to better understand how these constructs relate. For the purpose of this study, it is proposed that sexual fantasies are a significant contributor (i.e., potential mediating variable) to the association between social relationships with children and history of sexual offending.

Perhaps less obvious is the potential association between sexual fantasies and experiences of suicidality. Regardless of the lack of association between sexual fantasies and suicidality within the current literature, it is hypothesized that the presence of sexual fantasies involving children is a contributing factor, such that, experiences of fantasies exacerbate feelings of suicidality.

Figure 1.
Model for the mediating effect of the three proposed mediators on the relationship between perceived friendships with children, length of social relationships with children, and suicidality.
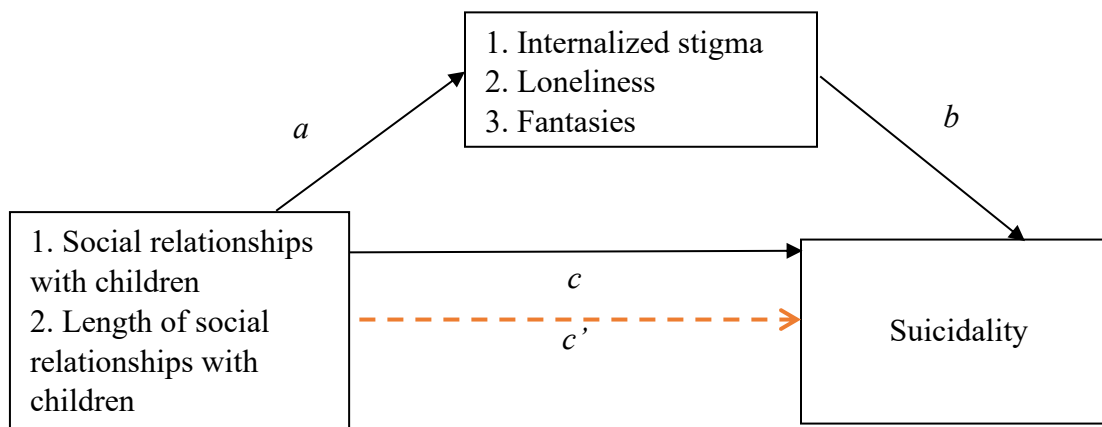
Note. The association between perceived friendships with children as well as length of social relationships with children and suicidality is mediated by the following: internalized stigma, loneliness, and sexual fantasies involving children.

Figure 2.

Model for the mediating effect of the three proposed mediators on the relationship between perceived friendships with children, length of social relationships with children and history of child sexual abuse.
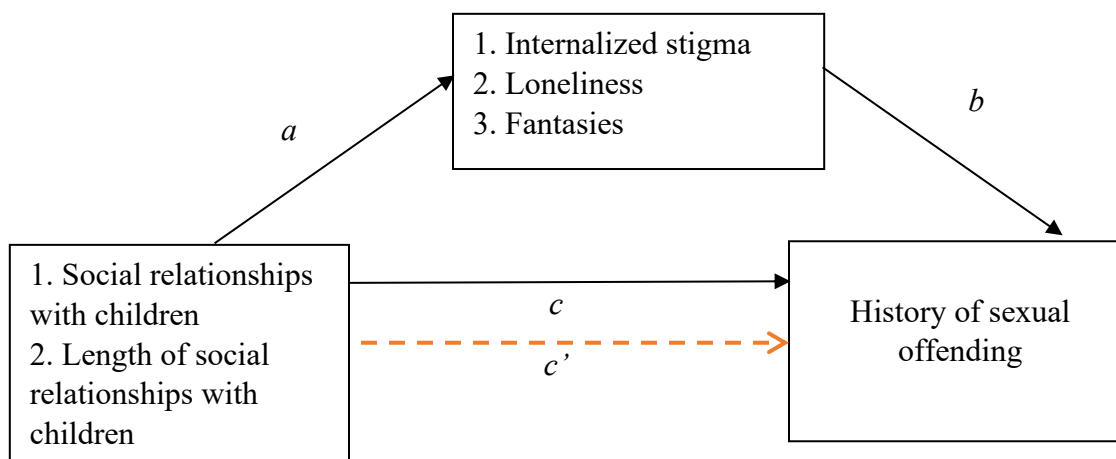
Note. The association between perceived friendships with children as well as length of social relationships with children and history of sexual offending is mediated by the following: internalized stigma, loneliness, and sexual fantasies involving children.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data collection occurred via an anonymous online survey. To be eligible for the present study, participants were required to be 18 years of age and identify as having a sexual interest in children. The latter was done using the Age Orientation Scale (Prepubescent and Pubescent) as seen in the Measure section below. Data collection of the present study was collected via two rounds of recruitment. This first round of recruitment included questions on history of sexual offending against children and the second round omitted these questions. The survey link was distributed to forums directed to pedohebephilic individuals. The link to the survey was also shared on Twitter by the author and the author's honours co-supervisor.

The first round of recruitment received responses from 189 participants. Participants were excluded if they did not respond to the Age Orientation Scale – Prepubescent and Pubescent; $n =$ 36), indicated exclusive interests in adults ($n = 7$), failed to indicate their age or were under the required age ($n = 19$). This resulted in a total of 155 participants recruited during the first recruitment round.

During the second round of recruitment 51 participants were collected. Two of the participants did not indicate sexual interest in children and an additional two participants did not provide responses for the age orientation questions, therefore a total of four participants were excluded resulting in a sample of 47 participants from the second recruitment round. Six participants were removed from analyses following the assessment of multivariate assumptions (i.e., six participant responses were deemed to be outliers). Combined, the total sample for

analysis was 196 participants. The average age of the sample was 33 years old (SD = 12.9). Demographic and descriptive information for the sample is available in Table 1.[1]

The data presented here was collected for the author's psychology honours research project under the supervision of Dr. Mark Olver and Dr. Ian McPhail at the University of Saskatchewan. The decision was made to use the same dataset for the current master's thesis as it allows for testing of the proposed mediation models without having to re-collect the same type of responses from a population that could be subject to research fatigue due to the increased number of studies in this area. Further, the data on social relationships with children has not yet been published and the research questions examined here are distinct from the author's honours research project in that they focus on mediation models.

The survey link, provided by SosciSurvey, directed participants to the study survey. Participants were required to review and provide consent prior to responding to the survey questions. The consent form reviewed the purpose of the research, eligibility, review of potential risk and benefits of participating, anonymity and right to withdraw at any time. Participants were made aware in the consent form that there would be no compensation for participating in this study. The project was reviewed and approved (at both recruitment times) by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Additionally, an exception for a full ethics board review was granted by Saint Mary's University.

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[1] It is important to note that since all participants completed the survey anonymously, it is impossible to determine whether the participants who completed the survey during the first round of recruitment did not complete the survey a second time during the second round of recruitment as well.

Table 1.
Demographic and Descriptive Characteristics.

Variable	n	%
Sex	196	-
Male	151	77
Female	15	7.7
Other	30	15.3
Exclusivity[a]	196	-
Exclusively pedohebephilic	96	49
Non-Exclusively pedohebephilic	100	51
Sexual orientation	196	-
Heterosexual/Mostly Heterosexual	95	48.5
Bisexual	38	19.4
Homosexual/ Mostly Homosexual	47	24
Asexual	3	1.5
Other	13	6.6
Ethnicity	194	-
African American	5	2.6
Asian	2	1.0
Caucasian	168	85.7
First Nations	4	2.0
Other	17	8.7
Employment	196	-
Employed	111	56.7
Not employed	71	36.2
Other	14	7.1
Education	196	-
High school diploma	68	35
College diploma/University degree	86	44
Master's degree/Doctorate/PhD	24	12
Other	18	9
Relationship Status	196	-
Single	132	67.3
Dating	8	4.1
Committed relationship	20	10.2
Common law/Living together	4	2.0
Engaged	3	1.5
Married	17	8.7
Divorced	7	3.6
Other	5	2.6
History of sexual offending[b]	155	-
Yes	27	17.4
No	128	82.6

Note. [a]Determined using Age Orientation Scale. Exclusively pedophebephilic refers to individuals who experience an exclusive attraction to children. Non-exclusively pedohebephilic

refers to individuals who experience an attraction to children as well as adults.
[b]Includes contact and child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) offences.

Measures

  Demographic Questions. Participants answered demographic questions regarding age, biological sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, employment status, education, and relationship status. The purpose of the demographic questions was to provide some basic information about the individuals who participated in the study.

  Suicide Behaviour Questionnaire-Revised. The Suicide Behaviour Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R) is a four-item scale examining thoughts of suicide, frequency of these thoughts, disclosure of suicidal thoughts to others, and likelihood of committing suicide in the future (Linehan & Neilsen, 1981). The SBQ-R is used as the measure of suicidality in the present study. Total scores range from 3 to 18 with higher scores indicating higher levels of suicidality. The internal consistency in present sample, was $\alpha = .82$, which is consistent with past research on clinical ($\alpha = .87$) and non-clinical ($\alpha = .76$) samples (Osman et al., 2001). Intercorrelations of all scale items ranged from $r = .62$ to $r = .76$ with a high criterion validity ranging from $AUC = .89$ to $AUC = .98$ across differing samples (Osman et al., 2001).

  History of Sexual Offending. Participants were asked two questions about their sexual offence history. As a reminder, only participants recruited in round one of data collection were asked sexual offence history questions. First, participants were asked whether they have previously been arrested, charged, or convicted for a sexual contact offence against a child (yes/no). The age of the child was not specified for participants. Participants were then prompted to disclose whether they had previously been arrested, charged, or convicted for "child pornography" (yes/no). Note the term "child pornography" was used in the questions provided to participants but will herein be referred to as "child sexual exploitation material/ CSEM offences". Similar questions have been used in previous studies (e.g., Stephens & McPhail,

2021). For the purposes of the present study, the questions assessing contact offences and child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) offences were combined. This resulted in a final sample of 155 participants for the analyses using offence history as the outcome variable. The variable was dichotomized where 1 = yes, sex offence history and 2 = no sex offence history.

   Internalized Pedonegativity Scale. The Internalized Pedonegativity Scale was developed by Elchuk et al. (2022) by adapting the Internalized Homophobia Scale (Wagner et al., 1994; Wagner, 2011) to assess experiences of internalized stigma among pedohebephilic individuals. The Internalized Homophobia Scale was developed to measure the extent to which negative attitudes and beliefs are internalized and integrated into how one feels about their sexual identity among gay men. Changes were made to the original scale by replacing the words "homosexual" with "attraction to children"; item content remained the same. The scale consists of 22 items that assess which negative attitudes and beliefs are internalized and how one feels about being attracted to children (e.g., "*If there were a pill that could change my minor attraction, I would take it" and "Attraction to children is deviant"*). Items are scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 Strongly disagree to 5 Strongly agree); higher scores indicate higher levels of internalized pedonegativity. High internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .94$) was found in the present sample, which is consistent with past research using the Internalized Homophobia scale ($\alpha = .92$; Wagner et al., 1994) with gay men. The Internalized Homophobia scale demonstrates high convergent validity (i.e., positively correlated) with related constructs such as: demoralization ($r = .49$), psychological distress ($r = .37$), and depression ($r = .36$; Wagner et al., 1994). The adapted measure, Internalized Pedonegativity Scale, exhibits high convergent validity with similar constructs such as psychological distress ($r = .28$) and loneliness ($r = .36$).

Revised University of California, Los Angeles Loneliness Scale. This 20-item scale measures subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Russell et al., 1980). Participants rate their feelings on each item using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *Never* to 4 = *Often*). Total scores range from 20 to 80 with higher scores indicating a greater degree of loneliness. The internal consistency in the present sample was α = .94 which is consistent with previous literature that found high internal consistency ranging from α = .89 to α = .94 on a similar version of the scale with a high test-retest correlation over period of 2-months (r = .73; Russel, 1996). Additionally, this scale shows adequate convergent validity demonstrated by significant correlations to other measures of loneliness and satisfaction of social support (r = -.56; Russel, 1996).

Sexual Fantasies Involving Children. To assess whether participants engage in sexual fantasies involving children, participants were asked to respond to the following: *Please think of a typical week in the last year: Please estimate the amount of time you spend with sexual fantasies and sexual urges involving children* (Elchuk, 2019). Participants indicate the amount of time spent on sexual fantasies involving children in hours. This question regarding sexual fantasies was used to determine whether participants were engaging in sexual fantasies involving children (i.e., participants who indicate more than 0 hours a week are be considered as engaging in sexual fantasies involving children).

Social Relationships with Children and Length of Friendships with Children.
Questions on this topic were developed by the author, Dr. Ian McPhail, and Dr. Mark Olver. Participants were asked to indicate whether they currently have social relationships with children and/or if they previously had social relationships with children in the past. Participants indicating either (1) currently have social relationships with children, and (2) previously having social relationships with children were combined into one item for analyses. Social relationships with

children were defined for participants noting these friendships involve an adult (18 years or older) currently having a friendship with a child (someone who is under the age of 16 years old). The following definition of friendship was provided to participants: *'Friend' can be defined as a partner in friendship with whom you are in regular contact and/or regularly spend time with.* Following this definition, participants are asked: "*How many young friends do you currently have?*" and "*How many young friends have you had in the past?*". Participants were considered as having a social relationship with a child when they responded to either currently or previously having a social relationship/friendship with a child (i.e., 1 or more). Social relationships with children was then dichotomized where 0 = no social relationships with children and 1= social relationships with children are present. Participants were also asked to indicate how long they have been involved in a friendship/social relationship(s) with a child/children. Length of friendships with children was calculated in years (i.e., as a continuous variable). All questions are included in Appendix A.

Additional Descriptive Questions Regarding Social Contact with Children

Participants were asked additional questions regarding social contact with children and desire to have social relationships with children. Frequency of contact with children was assessed using the question, "*How regularly do you talk or have social contact with children*?". Participants responded with one of the following responses: *daily, more than 3 times a week, weekly, less than once a week, less than once a month.* Desire to have a child-friend was assessed using the following question, "*If you don't have a young friend, would you like one*?"; response options were "*yes*", "*no*", or "*I already have a young friend*". Participants were asked, "*Do you wish you had more young friends*?"; response options were "*yes*" or "*no*". Finally, participants

were presented with the statement, "*I prefer having a child as a friend over having an adult as a friend.*"; response options were "*true*" or "*false*".

Age Orientation Scale – Prepubescent and Pubescent Versions. The Age Orientation Scale – Prepubescent and Pubescent Versions are based on the Kinsey Scale for sexual orientation (Kinsey et al., 1948). The Age Orientation Scale, developed by McPhail and Stephens (2018) assesses the level of exclusivity individuals experience in their sexual attraction to prepubescent and pubescent children. Participants use a 7-point Likert scale (0 = *Exclusively interested in fully mature adults* to 6 = *Exclusively interested in prepubescent children or pubescent children*) with the option to respond with X (*No interest in prepubescent/pubescent children or fully mature adults*). In the present study, the scale was used to identify participants with self-reported sexual interest in children for inclusion in the study. A score of six on either the Prepubescent or Pubescent versions were considered to be exclusively pedohebephilic. Participants that indicate an exclusive attraction to adults on both prepubescent and pubescent versions (i.e., score of zero) are excluded from further analysis.

Erotic Age Orientation Grid. This scale was adapted from the Sexual Orientation Grid for erotic sexual interest (Klein et al., 1985). Adaptations were made to the five-items to replace sexual orientation (heterosexual/homosexual) with age orientation (pedophile/teleiophile). This measure has demonstrated good convergent validity when compared to other well validated measures (see McPhail & Stephens, 2022). For all five items, participants select one of the seven response options (i.e., "*adults only*", "*adults mostly*", "*adults somewhat*", "*both children and adults*", "*children somewhat*", "*children mostly*" and "*children only*") to correspond with their past, present, and ideal erotic age orientation. Erotic age orientation is a term used to describe the erotic preference to a certain age group, whereas sexual orientation is a term typically used to

describe erotic preference related to gender (Blanchard et al., 2009). This scale was used to determine the participant's preferences of attractions, behaviours, and fantasies, as well as emotional and social preferences in adults or children (emotional congruence with children; ECWC). -Responses collected from this scale were used in peripheral analyses to examine correlations among other measures in the study as well as assist in informing Study two of the current thesis. Two items of the Erotic Age Orientation Grid were combined to make up an item of ECWC. The two items combined were, *"In the past, who did you feel more drawn to or close to emotionally? Who would you fall in love with?"* and "*In the present, who do you feel more drawn to or close to emotionally? Who would you fall in love with?*". Participants with higher scores on this combined item were considered to be higher in ECWC. These analyses are exploratory and aim to provide a more fulsome understanding of the current sample.

Analytic Strategy

Bivariate correlations between all variables were performed to identify significant relationships between the variables. A total of 12 simple mediation models were then analyzed using the IBM SPSS Version 28 with the program add-on PROCESS (Hayes, 2017). All analyses examining suicidality included the entire sample ($n = 196$); however, due to the abovementioned limitations on participant recruitment, a sample of 155 participants responded to the history of sexual offending questions. To ensure the dataset was appropriate for the planned analyses, multivariate assumptions were examined and addressed accordingly.

Receiver operating characteristics (ROC) were used to examine the bivariate associations of the main dichotomous variables of the study (social relationships with children and history of sexual offending) and other variables of interest. ROC depicts the probability curve and the area under the curve (AUC) represents the measure of separability between the two groups in

comparison. This means, the higher the AUC, the better the model is at distinguishing between those who have previously sexually offended and those who have not previously offended (Narkhede, 2018).

<div align="center">Results</div>

Descriptives

Descriptive information about social relationships with children can be found in Table 2. Among study participants, 50% ($n = 98$) indicated a desire to have social relationships with children, whereas 20% ($n = 39$) did not. Alternatively, 30% ($n = 58$) noted they already have a current social relationship with at least one child. Furthermore, most of the sample, 67.3% ($n = 132$) indicated a desire for having more social relationships with children. Among those with ongoing social relationships with children, the average length of friendships was 4.5 years with 36% ($n = 70$) having contact with their child-friend(s) weekly. When asked if participants prefer children as friends over having adults as friends, 40% ($n = 79$) indicated a preference for social contact with children.

Regarding the manner of communication with children, in general, 66% ($n = 133$) of participants indicated they have regular social contact with children in person, 31% ($n = 63$) noted regular online text chatting or video chatting, and 5.4% ($n = 11$) noted regular phone contact. A quarter of the sample (25%; $n = 51$) stated they do not have regular contact with children.

Table 2.

Descriptive Characteristics of Social Relationships with Children

Variable	n	%
Social relationships with children	196	-
Yes	127	64.8
No	69	35.2
Frequency of contact	196	-
Daily	25	12.8
More than 3x a week	17	8.7
Weekly	28	14.3
Less than once a week	34	17.3
Less than once a month	45	23.0
Never	47	24.0
Want a child as a friend	196	-
Yes	99	51
No	39	20
I already have a "young friend(s)"	58	29
Wish for more child friends	196	-
Yes	132	67.3
No	64	32.7
Preference for children as friends	195	-
Yes	79	41
No	116	59

Note. Table shows descriptive statistics of pedohebephilic individuals when responding to questions about social relationships with children.

Bivariate Correlations

To assess the association between all continuous variables, bivariate correlations were examined (see Table 3) [2]. Length of friendships with children was significantly positively correlated with engaging in fantasies involving children ($r = .16$; $p = .02$). Loneliness was positively associated with suicidality ($r = .41$; $p < .001$) and internalized stigma ($r = .27$; $p <$

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[2] In post hoc analyses, the author combined two items of the Erotic Age Orientation Grid (see below) in an attempt to more accurately capture the main construct of social relationships with children. The two items assessing social preference were, "*In the past, which age groups did you socialize with? and "In the present, which age group do you socialize with?*". Participants with higher scores on this combined item were considered to have more social relationships with children. Correlation and mediation analyses were performed using this variable and results continued to suggest the absence of partial and/or full mediation with any of the proposed mediators.

.001). Internalized stigma was also positively correlated with suicidality ($r = .32$; $p < .001$). Sexual fantasies involving children was not associated with any of the study variables, with the exception of length of friendships with children ($r = .16$; $p < .05$). Interestingly, ECWC was significantly negatively correlated with internalized stigma ($r = -.66$; $p < .001$) but was significantly positively correlated with loneliness ($r = .22$; $p < .01$). Together, the effect sizes ranged from $r = -.66$ to $r = .41$ with the effect size between loneliness and suicidality as well ECWC and internalized stigma particularly noteworthy. As per Cohen (1992) guidelines for correlation effect size, magnitudes of .10, .30, and .50 are interpreted as small, medium, and large, respectively.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

	n	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Length of friendships with children[a]	193	4.46 (5.09)	-					
2. Suicidality	196	9.60 (4.11)	-.06	-				
3. Loneliness	196	54.03 (12.96)	-.03	.41**	-			
4. Internalized stigma	196	64.48 (20.15)	.08	.32**	.27**	-		
5. Fantasies	194	10.54 (16.40)	.16*	.09	.01	.11	-	
6. ECWC	195	7.13 (3.53)	.08	.04	.22**	-.22**	-.01	-

Note. [a] In years. ECWC = Emotional congruence with children.
*p <.05;** p < .01.

As can be seen in Table 4, all AUC values were within the .418 to .598 range, apart from length of friendships and social relationships with children. When interpreting AUCs, values within the .4 - .6 range demonstrate relatively weak predictive accuracy (McGraw & Wong., 1992). Length of friendships with children appears to show weak predictive accuracy (i.e., a small effect size) among individuals with a history of sexual offending against children (AUC = .598). Similar AUC values (.560 and .549) show an even weaker relationship between history of sexual offending and internalized stigma and loneliness respectively. Furthermore, social relationships with children demonstrated high predictive accuracy with length of friendships with children (AUC = .956). This high AUC value is to be expected given both variables are examining the same construct, but in a slightly different way; such that social relationships with children focuses on the *presence* of a relationship, whereas length of friendships with children focuses more on *maintaining* social relationships with children long term. Finally, to examine the association between social relationships with children and history of sexual offending, logistic

regression was performed and provided an odds ratio of 1.05 (95% confidence interval [CI] = 0.44, 2.52).

Typically, given the lack of correlation between the predictor variables and the outcomes variables, mediation analyses would not proceed; however, it has been argued that correlation between predictor and outcomes variables is not necessary for mediation (Hayes, 2017, page 80). Coupled with the knowledge of high prevalence of internalized stigma and loneliness experienced by pedohebephilic individuals as well as the link between sexual fantasies and history of committing a sexual offence the decision was made to proceed with the mediation analyses as proposed in the development of this study.

Table 4.

Study Variables and ROCs with Sexual Offending and Social Relationship with Children Criteria

Sexual offending against children	AUC [95% CI]	p
Length of friendships with children (yrs)	.598 [.381, .622]	.111
Loneliness	.549 [.434, .663]	.418
Internalized stigma	.560 [.448, .673]	.327
Fantasies involving children	.471 [.337, .605]	.633
Suicidality	.475 [.341, .608]	.680
Social relationships with children	AUC [95% CI]	p
Length of friendships with children (yrs)	.956 [.927, .986]	.001***
Loneliness	.440 [.352, .528]	.173
Internalized stigma	.462 [.379, .545]	.387
Fantasies involving children	.494 [.408, .580]	.893
Suicidality	.418 [.335, .501]	.061

Note. ***$p < .001$.

Statistical Mediation Analyses

  Simple mediation models were used to examine whether loneliness, internalized stigma, and sexual fantasizes involving children mediated the association between social relationships with children (dichotomous yes/no variable) and suicidality and history of sexual offending. These analyses were then repeated with the second predictor variable, length of social relationships with children, and both outcome variables, suicidality, and history of sexual offending. Note that all mediation models were run separately, resulting in a total of 12 mediation analyses (see Tables 5-8). Contrary to the hypotheses, none of the mediation models reached significance meaning that loneliness, internalized stigma, and sexual fantasies involving children did not fully mediate nor partially mediate the relationship between both predictor variables and both outcome variables.

Table 5. *Regression table for mediation analysis with social relationships with children as the predictor variable and suicidality as the outcome variable.*

Mediator	Effect of social relationships with children on mediator (*a* path)	Effect of mediator on suicidality (*b* path)	Indirect effect (*ab* path)	R^2 of total effect model
Loneliness	-2.08 (1.94); *p* = .28	-.80 (.56); *p* = .16	-.27 (.26)	.02; *p* = .08
	R^2 = .08; *p* = .28	R^2 = .18; *p* < .001***		
Internalized stigma	-3.19 (3.01); *p* = .29	-.86 (.58); *p* = .14	-.20 (.19)	.02; *p* = .08
	R^2 = .01; *p* = .29	R^2 = .11; *p* < .001***		
Sexual fantasies involving children	-.17 (2.46); *p* = .94	-1.05 (.61); *p* = .08	-.00 (.08)	.01; *p* = .09
	R^2 = .00; *p* = .95	R^2 = .02; *p* = .10		

*Note. ***p < .001. All coefficients reported for the paths *a*, *b*, and *ab* are unstandardized effects with the corresponding standard error in parentheses.

Table 6. *Regression table for mediation analysis with social relationships with children as the predictor variable and history of sexual offending as the outcome variable.*

Mediator	Effect of social relationships with children on mediator (*a* path)	Effect of mediator on history of sexual offending (*b* path)	Indirect effect (*ab* path)
Loneliness	-1.91 (2.19); $p = .39$	-.08 (.45); $p = .45$	.03 (.06)
Internalized stigma	-1.60 (3.46); $p = .64$	-.06 (.45); $p = .89$	.02 (.06)
Sexual fantasies involving children	-1.12 (2.91); $p = .70$	-.08 (.45); $p = .86$	.01 (.06)

*Note. All coefficients reported for the paths *a*, *b*, and *ab* are unstandardized effects with the corresponding standard error in parentheses.

Table 7. *Regression table for mediation analysis with length of friendships with children as the predictor variable and suicidality as the outcome variable.*

Mediator	Effect of length of friendships with children on mediator (a path)	Effect of mediator on suicidality (b path)	Indirect effect (ab path)	R^2 of total effect model
Loneliness	-.08 (.18); $p = .67$	-.04 (.05); $p = .47$	-.04 (.05)	.00; $p = .40$
	$R^2 = .00$; $p = .67$	$R^2 = .17$; $p < .001$***		
Internalized stigma	.32 (.29); $p = .26$	-.07 (.06); $p = .20$	.02 (.03)	.00; $p = .40$
	$R^2 = .01$; $p = .26$	$R^2 = .12$; $p < .001$***		
Sexual fantasies involving children	.51 (.23); $p = .03$*	-.06 (.06); $p = .29$	.01 (.02)	.00; $p = .40$
	$R^2 = .02$; $p = .03$*	$R^2 = .01$; $p = .25$		

*Note. *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$. All coefficients reported for the paths a, b, and ab are unstandardized effects with the corresponding standard error in parentheses.

Table 8. *Regression table for mediation analysis with length of friendship with children as the predictor variable and history of sexual offending as the outcome variable.*

Mediator	Effect of length of friendships with children on mediator (*a* path)	Effect of mediator on history of sexual offending (*b* path)	Indirect effect (*ab* path)
Loneliness	-.00 (.20); *p* = .99	-.01 (.03); *p* = .00***	.00 (.01)
Internalized stigma	.42 (.31); *p* = .17	-.08 (.03); *p* = .01**	-.00 (.01)
Sexual fantasies involving children	.44 (.26); *p* = .09	-.08 (.03); *p* = .02*	-.00 (.01)

*Note. *p* < .05 **p* <.01 ***p* <.001. All coefficients reported for the paths *a*, *b*, and *ab* are unstandardized effects with the corresponding standard error in parentheses.

Discussion

The present study examined potential mediators of the association between perceived social relationships with children, length of friendships with children and the outcome variables, suicidality, and history of sexual offending. Results demonstrated associations between loneliness, internalized stigma, and suicidality but failed to support the proposed mediation models. A further aim of this study was to explore correlations of the study variables with items assessing ECWC as well as manner and frequency study participants contact children. Despite the hypothesis being unsupported, findings of this study are important and contribute meaningfully to the existing literature on pedohebephilic individuals.

Exploratory analyses were performed on questions assessing ECWC as well as the manner and frequency in which participants contact children. ECWC was assessed by noting the percentage of participants who indicated a preference for children over adults when asked about their emotional and social attraction. A significant portion of the sample (41%) were noted to have high levels of ECWC. It is possible that ECWC is associated with seeking social relationships with children and perhaps may even mediate the associations between social relationships with children and outcome variables. Furthermore, half of the participants indicated a desire for having social relationships with children and among those who had child-friends at the time of the study, 67% wished they had more child-friends. These findings suggest these social relationships are perceived by those with sexual interest in children as fulfilling and meaningful; however, the author cautions endorsement of these relationships. Further research is needed to assess why pedohebephilic individuals prefer social relationships with children and

how treatment providers can provide support and assistance with fostering healthy social relationships with adults instead of children.

Bivariate Associations

When examining intercorrelations between the study variables, participants reporting higher levels of loneliness and internalized stigma tended to also report higher levels of suicidality.. Participants experiencing internalized stigma also were associated with experiences of loneliness. These findings contribute to the literature by further solidifying the association between internalized stigma and loneliness, two constructs which are highly salient among pedohebephilic individuals (Cohen et al., 2019; Jahnke 2018).

The association between length of friendships with children and history of sexual offending is also worth mentioning. Results show a small effect size (AUC = .598; Rice & Harris, 2005) indicating a weak effect between the length of friendships and history of sexual offending; however more research is required to confirm this association. Finally, participants engaging in sexual fantasies involving children were not significantly associated with having a history of sexual offending against children. This finding is contrary to previous research that has made connections between fantasies and child sexual abuse (Bailey et al., 2016; Cantor & McPhail, 2016).

When assessing suicidality, it was found to not be significantly correlated with having social relationships with children or length of friendships with children. This finding was unexpected, especially since previous analysis of social relationships with children (using responses collected from round one of data collection; $n = 110$ at the time of analyses) showed a negative significant correlation with suicidality ($r = -.23$; $p < .05$; Elchuk, 2019). Thus, in

collecting more responses it appears that the nature of the correlation changes. A possible explanation for the difference of findings is the current study sample contained nearly double the number of participants as in the Elchuk (2019) study. Given that the sample here is larger, these results are more robust than the earlier study that examined this association. Additionally, the variable of social relationships with children was dichotomized in the present study and as a result was examined using ROC analyses, whereas in the Elchuk (2019) study, social relationships with children was kept as a continuous variable and analyzed with bivariate correlations. The differences in operationalizing the variables also likely contributed to the lack of significance between social relationships with children and suicidality in the present study.

Mediation Results

The present study is the first to examine possible mediators between social relationships with children, suicidality, and history of sexual offending. When examining the twelve mediation models conducted, results indicated loneliness, internalized stigma, and sexual fantasies involving children were unsuccessful in mediating the associations between social relationships with children and both suicidality and history of sexual offending. The same was true for the association between length of friendships with children and suicidality and history of sexual offending. Therefore, the proposed hypotheses were unsupported by the data.

Despite none of the proposed variables being successful mediators, this study provides us with important information regarding social relationships with children. First, it is possible that moderation is present instead of mediation, such that the proposed mediators may, in fact, be moderators which are influencing the strength and direction of the association between social relationships and suicidality and/or history of offending. For example, sexual fantasies involving children may be a moderator of the interaction between social relationships with children and

history of offending, in that the more an individual engages in these fantasies, the more likely they are to have a history of sexual offending. Conversely, it is possible among those with social relationships with children, the less an individual engages in sexual fantasies involving children, the less likely they are to have a history of sexual offending.

Another possibility is that social relationships with children among this population are much more complicated than initially proposed. Perhaps there is a form of mediated moderation or moderated mediation that is present. Another possibility is there are mediating effects present, but we did not look at these variables. For instance, it is possible other variables such as self-esteem or ECWC are mediating the association between length of friendship with children as well as social relationships with children and both suicidality and history of sexual offending. Future research should carefully examine different possible mediators using a larger sample.

Another possibility for the lack of significant findings could be due to limitations on methodology and measurement issues such as defining the criteria for what constitutes a friendship/ social relationship with a child as well as the combining of individuals who had previously committed contact sexual offences with those who committed CSEM offences. Regardless, it is important to note these social relationships appear to be more complex than initially proposed and further research is required to better understand these social relationships among pedohebephilic individuals.

Limitations

There are several limitations within the present study. First, there were two rounds of participant recruitment and given that no identifying information was collected within our study sample, it is possible (but unlikely) that some of the same individuals who participated in round one, also participated in round two.

Another important limitation is the operationalization of some of the variables. For example, social relationships with children were defined as an adult (18 years or older) having a friendship with a child (someone who is under the age of 16 years old). This poses a problem when interpreting results as there are almost certainly significant differences between an 18-year-old who is friends with a 7-year-old, versus an 18-year-old who is friends with a 16-year-old. The author recognizes an age gap of two years is not comparable to an age gap of 9 years. Future studies would do well to ask participants their age and the age of the child in which they consider to be their friend for a more accurate examination of child-friends. Similarly, another limitation was noted when inquiring about the frequency of contact with children. Note the question referred to any social contact with children and did not specify social contact with their child-friends, therefore it is difficult to make conclusions regarding frequency of contact with children that are considered to be a child-friend compared to children who may be considered an acquaintance.

The sequencing of variables also poses a problem in the present study. Given the cross-sectional nature of the present study the direction of the associations cannot be determined. For instance, it is possible that some individuals committed a sexual offence against a child during the time they did not have social relationships with children. Further, there is debate on whether it is appropriate to examine mediation models in cross-sectional studies (Maxwell & Cole, 2007; Rucker et al., 2011). Therefore, these associations should be interpreted with extreme caution and future studies should ask for specific timelines when attempting to make such connections or use prospective studies.

Finally, the author acknowledges the limitation in combining contact sexual offending and CSEM offending into one variable. Combining the two variables was done due to the low base

rate of offending within the sample, but there are likely significant differences when comparing contact and CSEM sexual offences. Future studies should separate these types of offending to accurately assess any differences between those who have social relationships with children and types of offending. For example, it is possible that the association between social relationships with children and sexual offending might be more robust when considering contact offending. By extension, it is also possible the mediation analyses may have looked differently for this type of offending. Regardless of the present study limitations, this thesis is one of the first to directly examine social relationships with children among pedohebephilic individuals and highlights the need for further research (see Chapter four for future research directions).

Chapter 3: Study 2

Introduction

Results from Study 1 provide researchers and clinicians with an improved understanding of the social relationships experienced by pedohebephilic individuals; however, much is still unknown as to why a subset of this population seek social connections with children. To provide a more nuanced understanding of these social relationships with children, Study 2 examines: (1) reasons pedohebephilic individuals seek social relationships with children, and (2) how pedohebephilic individuals conceptualize their social relationships with children. Given that much of the relevant literature on the importance of social relationships is reviewed in Chapter 1, the literature reviewed in the current chapter will provide an overview of our current understanding of intergenerational friendships and how previous research examining adult-adult social relationships may help provide a basic understanding of child-adult social relationships.

To understand why pedohebephilic individuals prefer and seek out children as friends, we must understand the ways friendships and social relationships are conceptualized within the wider academic literature. Friendships can generally be explained using the concept of homophily – the idea that similarity breeds connection (McPherson et al., 2001). Homophily suggests individuals tend to affiliate themselves with others who are similar in nature (Louch, 2000; McCroskey et al., 2006; McPherson et al., 2001). Significant research has been done in the field of sociology and it is understood that generally peers of the same age are likely to connect as they typically experience similar life events over ones' lifetime (Adams & Blieszner, 1989; O'Dare et al., 2021).

Considering same-age peers are more likely to interact socially, it is reasonable to deduce that individuals with significant differences in age are less likely to interact socially. Indeed,

research has examined generational differences and intergenerational friendships among adult populations and found such social relationships are significantly less common due to differing life interests and experiences (Allen, 1989). Other researchers have highlighted a general disapproval of intergenerational friendships within the general population (Williams & Nussbaum, 2000). There is a general social norm of interacting with others who are of similar same age and explicit discouragement of intergenerational friendships have been noted in society (i.e., "act your age"; Williams & Nussbaum, 2000). Given this general societal opposition towards intergenerational friendships, and that the research noting these findings have been conducted on solely adult populations, it is likely that intergenerational friendships between adults and children would be perceived as unacceptable. Coupled with the high levels of societal stigma and loneliness among pedohebephilic individuals, such individuals with children as friends may conceptualize their social relationships with children as threatening to their identity and may contribute to shame and concealment of such friendships.

More recently, O'Dare and colleagues (2020) challenged the idea of there being little in common among those with intergenerational friendships. Using adult participants, the study showed many find common interests and experiences among individuals of differing generations, which can lead to intergenerational friendship; however, all participants were adults who, despite belonging to differing generations, may still have a significant amount in common (e.g., employment, financial responsibilities). Again, when applying this concept to intergenerational friendships among children and adults, it seems increasingly less likely there would be commonalities.

Finally, an important aspect to consider when examining pedohebephilic individuals and social relationships with children is the well-established literature on sexual grooming

behaviours. Sexual grooming is described as the process by which individuals attempt to facilitate sexual contact with a minor while avoiding detection (Winters et al., 2022). Research examining the process of online sexual grooming describes six stages with the first stage being the friendship-forming stage (O'Connell 2003). In fact, several studies have proposed many stages of grooming that suggested, developing a "friendship", or interacting with the child in a "peer-like environment" are important criteria of grooming children (see Bennet & O'Donohue, 2014).

Another study investigating key themes of online grooming behaviours found that all adolescents who experienced online grooming indicated having normal conversations with their abusers and spoke with them similarly as to how they would talk to their similar-aged friends (Whittle et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important to look at the manner in which pedohebephilic individuals interact with children and whether there are indications of possible grooming behaviours. Currently, very little is known about how pedohebephilic individuals contact and interact socially with children, therefore if these attempts at social relationships with children can be identified by mental health practitioners, it is possible that we may be able to prevent child sexual abuse.

Finally, as mentioned in Study 1, our understanding of the presence ECWC among pedohebephilic individuals may help to further our understanding of social relationships with children. Given the high prevalence of individuals within forensic settings who perceive themselves as more childlike (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; McPhail et al., 2013; Paquette & McPhail, 2020) it is plausible that many pedohebephilic individuals who have not offended also perceive themselves as more childlike and therefore identify more closely with children. By applying the concept of homophily and the possible attribution to a more childlike lifestyle,

pedohebephilic individuals may seek friendships/ social relationships with children.

Furthermore, by relating with children, pedohebephilic individuals may not experience the

"generational gap" that is typically found between intergenerational adult friendships. Given this

has yet to be examined in the literature among pedohebephilic individuals, the present study aims

to determine possible reasons for seeking friendships with children and gain an understand of

how such individuals view their social relationships with children.

Present Study

The current study aims to further the understanding of social relationships with children

among pedohebephilic individuals. Study 2 explores the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons pedohebephilic individuals are seeking children as friends?

2. How do pedohebephilic individuals conceptualize their social relationship/friendship with children?

Method

Participants and Procedure

To address the research questions in study two, several online forum posts were collected

from two website forums directed towards pedohebephilic individuals. Selection of these

websites were based on the following criteria: both website forums (1) are targeted towards

pedohebephilic individuals, and (2) contain anonymous posts from those who identify as

pedohebephilic individuals. The author believes that by exploring both websites the responses

collected will be more indicative of a representative online sample of forum users with sexual

interest in children, as opposed to simply collecting responses from one forum. Furthermore, it is

the author's sense that many website users of one forum, in comparison to the other, may hold divergent ideologies regarding adult-child sex and/or sexual contact with children.

All forum users of both websites post anonymously therefore no identifying information was collected from participants. Permission to access these forums for the purposes of the present study was obtained by the moderators of both forums. Both forums consist of strict rules against discussing any identifying information and moderators of the forums frequently review (and occasionally remove) any forum posts by users that might hint at their identity. Furthermore, many forum participants are aware that not all individuals accessing the forum are pedohebephilic and some members are researchers or even possibly law enforcement who may monitor postings for illegal activity (Jones et al., 2021). Given the understanding that anyone could create a forum account, users are aware virtually anyone can gain access to these forums and therefore, many take additional steps to conceal any identifying information. Recent studies by Stevens and Woods (2019) and Jones et al. (2021) have used similar samples for coding forum posts by pedohebephilic individuals. Furthermore, other researchers have stated numerous benefits of collecting online, user-generated data such as the ability to search through discussions from the past (e.g., a week ago or even 10 years ago in some cases; Smedley & Coulson, 2021). Another benefit to collecting online forum posts is the ability to gain access to hard-to-reach populations, such as pedohebephilic individuals. Websites contain labeled discussion boards and "threads" which the author reviewed and only those of the highest relevance to social relationships with children and experiences with children in social were collected for analyses.

The author used a purposive sampling approach to gain a better understanding of social relationships with children (Patton, 2002 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013). The specific criterion used included ensuring that: (1) authors of the forum posts are sexually interested

and/or attracted to children, (2) the forum posts discuss "friendships" with children (i.e., social interaction with children, feelings surrounding social interactions with children, platonic feelings towards children, using the term "young friend(s)"). Given that both forum websites are specifically intended for pedohebephilic individuals and authors of the posts are anonymous, the assumption is that all posts are made by pedohebephilic individuals.

A total of 40 forum threads (190 individual posts) from January 2021 to October 2022 were collected. A thread is defined as a "topic", whereas a "post" is defined as an individual's entry within the thread. The decision to review forum posts within this specific timeframe was to ensure the data collected is as recent as possible, while also not including responses from the year 2020 when COVID-19 significantly affected the general population's social relationships (Long et al., 2022).

Planned Analyses

The author chose to use reflexive thematic analysis given the flexibility provided with this analytic method (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis where meaning and knowledge of the data is understood as contextual and researcher subjectivity is recognized as part of what shapes the research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis is particularly appropriate given that this is the first study to qualitatively examine social relationships with children among individuals with pedohebephilia. All of the collected responses were examined in NVivo, a commonly used qualitative software package to input the qualitative data to sort, analyze, and explore themes within the dataset (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Jones et al., 2021).

When conducting qualitative research, it can be difficult to determine the appropriate sample size. A commonly used approach when determining sample size is "saturation", referring

to the idea that data collection will be complete once no new information is discovered; however, this concept relies on a preconceived understanding of the concepts and/or themes within the data (Braun et al., 2019). Given the novelty of the present study coupled with the understanding that qualitative sample size is typically undeterminable prior to data collection (Braun et al., 2019), the author focused on retrieving as many forum posts as available within the allotted data collection timeframe. Other researchers examining forum posts among this population have achieved a similar sample size with acceptable results (Jones et al., 2021).

The author followed the (reflexive) thematic analysis six stage process developed by Braun and Clark (2013). During the first stage the author read and became familiar with the forums and forum posts. Throughout this qualitative data collection process and analysis, the author kept a journal to keep record of all important noticing's (i.e., any thoughts or perceptions to the forum posts) and/or decisions. One of the challenges the author encountered at this stage was that the title of the forum boards and thread were frequently ambiguously labeled. Note, a "forum board" is a collection of forum threads broadly discussing a certain subject. Since both boards and threads were, at times, difficult to determine whether discussion of social relationships with children would be included, the author chose forum boards with subjects that hinted at social relationships (e.g., "Family and Friends") and avoided forum board with subjects that were seemingly unrelated (e.g., "Joke of the Day").

The second stage involved coding the data using a complete coding technique which includes identifying anything and everything of interest or relevance to the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2013). Given that "social relationships" is a broad term, all posts viewed by the author within the specified timeframe with the mention of friendships or social relationships with children were included in the present study. The author attempted to disregard forum posts

focusing explicitly on sexual or romantic aspects of social relationships with children. A challenge the author encountered at this stage of analysis was that the mention of friendships or social relationships with children were frequently accompanied with mentions of romantic and or emotional attraction. This was unexpected but resulted in a shift from 'never collecting posts with mention of sexual and/or romantic attraction' to 'collecting posts with mention of sexual and/or romantic attraction as long as there was also explicit mention of being friends with the child'.

The third stage of coding consisted of searching for themes which have a central organizing concept (i.e., a central concept that conceptualizes themes as patterns of shared meaning underpinned or united by a core concept; Braun & Clarke, 2019). To determine the central organizing concept the coded responses was reviewed and separated into emerging patterns of similarity (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Initially, the author struggled with coding participant's posts for its contents and not the author's perception of its contents. Thankfully, during the subsequent stage of reviewing and revising themes, the author discussed the preliminary findings with their supervisor who flagged this issue early in the coding and organizing stage. Initially, the author found 35 codes within entire dataset, but upon further review, many of these codes were combined as they were essentially the same (e.g., the codes "Happiness of having a young friend" and "Feeling fortunate to have a young friend" were combined into one code). Furthermore, there were two codes that were not included in the development of the themes as they simply were a noticing by the author. These codes were "manner of communication" in which the author flagged the mention of how they were communicating with children they perceived as friends, and "circumstances of friendship" which included any brief mention of how the forum poster became friends the child/children.

The next stage was one of "quality control" to assess the fit of the themes once again within the coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The general findings were discussed with the author's supervisor once again to ensure the emerging themes, and the author's thought process throughout determining the themes, were logical. Finally, the last two stages involved defining and finalizing the themes. This consisted of assigning specific and accurate names to the themes and selecting data extracts that assisted in illustrating the respective theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Initially, the author separated the dataset into six themes, but upon refining and defining the themes, the author arrived at a final four themes which were distinct from one another.

Results

Qualitative reflexive thematic analysis resulted in four themes identified by the author within the current dataset. The themes were, "I will be left behind": Changing dynamics; "Adults are dull": Emotional congruence with children; "Slippery Slope": Challenges and risks of social relationships with children; and "Forced to unfriend her": Role of the social network. Note the quotes provided here are meant to capture the essence and complexity of each theme and therefore, one should refrain from relying on a single quote to distinguish one theme from another. Each of the themes are reviewed in detail below.

Given the terminology used on the selected forums when describing social relationships with children is described as "young friends/YFs"; this terminology will be used when discussing and reviewing direct quotes from forum users. Note the term "young friend" or "YF" may not accurately describe the social dynamic between the child and the adult and does not reflect the author's perspective or acceptance of the term, YF is used to remain as accurate and true to the data as possible. Additional terms used among pedohebephilic individuals to describe social relationships with children are "little friend (LF/lf)" or "little girl friend (LG friend/lgf)".

Finally, another term frequently used within the community, as well as in the quotes provided below is "MAP" or "map" which represents the term "minor-attracted persons/people"; a term occasionally used among pedohebephilic individuals and researchers as a stand-in for pedophilic or pedohebephilic individuals. In the discussion and remaining chapter, the language will revert to social relationships with children.

Theme 1 – "I will be left behind": Changing dynamics

This theme reflects content related to concerns and internal struggles experienced by pedohebephilic individuals surrounding their friendships with children. Codes that make up this theme consisted of feelings of loss (bordering on grief) experienced by posters when the child they are interested in starting a social relationship with may not be interested in them or willing to be friends with them; or the child decides they no longer want to be friends with an adult.

> Quote: "I want to die i don't feel like living anymore and have been depressed all day. I barely slept and thought of her all night and i miss her so much :(I had a small panic attack after i found out she unfriended me."

> Quote: "She was really upset when she had to move away, and gave me a big hug when she left. I cried all night when she was gone."

Furthermore, among those who did have YF(s), there were many forum posters who expressed feelings of missing their YF(s). This also included posts discussing how they were unsure when they would see their YF(s) again and believed their YF(s) were also missing them.

> Quote: "When it was time for me to leave, [YF name redacted] and I gave each other a long hug, and we both whispered how much we're gonna miss each other."

> Quote: "I knew this day would come, but now that I'm here, preparing to enter the world of full-time work, I'm really missing all the boy moments I had when I worked and volunteered with kids, and I miss [YF name redacted]. Boy, do I fucking miss [YF name redacted] already, and it hasn't even been that long."

Among posters who had YF(s) but were no longer in contact with them, they described grieving their loss of contact with their YF. Other forum posters expressed concern their YF(s) would grow up and/or outgrow their friendship with the forum poster.

> Quote: "This one hits really close to home. Fearing for the day she'll leave, it's something inevitable. Making memories helps, I try to leave a positive impact on all the LGs I come across to meet in this life. It's what they deserve ."
>
> Quote: "Girl Love is a beautiful thing thing but it also comes with pain when they outgrow you. Enjoy it while you have it"
>
> To summarize, this theme highlights the concerns of pedohebephilic individuals

surrounding their interactions with their YFs. Many of these concerns may be uniquely experienced by pedohebephilic individuals such that adult-adult friendships may not elicit concerns of their adult friends becoming "too old" to spend time with them. Another example of this is adult-adult friendships may not have the same barriers of child-adult friendships such that adults who are missing their adult friends are likely able to contact them and set up a time to connect, whereas this may prove difficult for an adult to do the same with their YF.

Theme 2: "Adults are dull": Emotional congruence with children

This theme reflects content related to struggles and lived experiences of pedohebephilic individuals that are unique to them as a group. As discussed throughout this thesis, emotional congruence with children (ECWC) has been proposed to be a common experience among pedohebephilic individuals. This notion of ECWC was further solidified by the present theme in that many pedohebephilic individuals expressed difficulty forming relationships with other adults or feeling unfulfilled in adult-adult friendships.

> Quote: "The sentence "*They're fun and interesting and much less dull than adults*" really resonated with me"
>
> Quote: "I find I can't connect with any of my adult-aged friends (except maps on the internet). I have some friends and I hang out with them and share with them but it just

doesn't feel like a real connection. I get along better with little girls when I get the chance. Maybe it's because I can't talk about my so-called love life. And they can't relate to having been raised by a narcissist either. I feel a connection with the teens who flirt with me but I don't get to make friends with those ones. I haven't been close to a teen in years."

Several pedohebephilic individuals also noted experiencing feelings of loneliness when interacting in adult-adult social situations. Furthermore, some forum posters who did not have YF(s) expressed their desire to have a child-adult social relationship.

Quote: "I feel what you mean to say: you can't be yourself when in company with adults. But don't consider that a wall that you cannot pass. You are just a part of yourself in any company. Even with little girls."

Quote: "I can relate to that. It's hard to make genuine connections when you have to put on a show. It's especially hard when you get to that point of wanting to have a closer connection, but knowing that they might hate you if they knew your whole self. "I like you" sounds so hollow when they don't know a big part about you and might decide to change that opinion if they did."

In addition to feeling a lack of connection with other adults, many forum posters expressed sincere happiness and joy when spending time with their YF(s) and shared instances of interactions and outings with their YF(s).

Quote: "Every non-offending, anti-contact MAP deserves a YF, and the times that I've been with [YF name redacted] have been the best times of my life."

Quote: "But with [YF name redacted], my gaming girl, it has been healthy and wholesome. I just love the times when she's here. and after she leaves it feels like I'm rejuvenated."

Also, in accordance with ECWC, some forum posters noted that while the social relationship with the child started off as platonic, they began to develop romantic feelings for their YF. Several posts highlighted posters discussing their emotional attraction and romantic love for their YF(s).

Quote: "Been visiting for over a year, but I'm always at work and wasn't crushing until recently.

Quote: "My daughter has been friends with this girl for years. I wasn't originally attracted to her that much but now that she's 11 I've started to feel it - and it feels really good and warm."

Quote: "after getting to know him, there's an emotional attraction and a sense of wanting to be his friend and hang out with him, something that I don't think I've felt for any other boy."

Quote: "I'm a girl-lover, and while I don't have *sexual* feelings for girls this young, my pedophilia is an emotional bond I have."

Quote: "I agree with [Username redacted]. Open adult-child friendships are fine as long as they're with genuine emotional connection and not just done with the intention of getting to admire the child's physicality."

Quote: "I'm in love, head over heels, my biggest crush, whatever you want to call it."

Quote: "I love him. Before getting to know him, boys were just people who I found attractive, and if I was lucky I'd get to interact with one. Of course, I have worked and continue to work with kids, and my memories from summer camp and other places will always linger in my mind"

Based on what is known in the literature regarding ECWC, this theme appears to corroborate what we currently understand as ECWC in that it encompasses a preference for spending time with children, child-like games, emotional and romantic attraction to children. A noteworthy finding here is that many of the codes that make up the theme of ECWC are not what we would expect to see in an adult-adult platonic relationship. An example of this is feeling emotionally and/or romantically attracted to their YF and expressing these feelings to other forum users.

Therefore, there appears to be a more romantic or intimate connotation or meaning that comes with the term "young friend". An example of this is many of the forum posts that make up this theme focus on romantic and emotional attraction to YFs which, by definition, is not included in platonic relationships. It is unlikely that words used to describe YFs within these forum posts are commonly used to describe purely platonic adult-adult relationships.

Theme 3: "Slippery slope": Challenges and risks of social relationships with children

The third theme reflects content related to challenges and potential risks of engaging in social relationships with children as flagged by other members of the community, as well as non-pedohebephilic individuals. The present theme highlights potentially concerning or risky behaviours with YFs, non-sexual physical contact with YF(s), physical attraction, gift-giving, as well as support to engage in social relationships with children from other pedohebephilic individuals on the forums.

An example of a forum poster expressing concern for another forum poster can be seen here:

> Quote: "I 'm glad for you, but well it's hard to tell you what could you do, if your intentions are more than friendship, don't risk it, nothing good could come out of it, maybe your overthinking the whole situation, you already thinking about the future, don't it'll only make it worse, day by day, you don't know what her intentions are, you don't even know if she's already with a little girlfriend or boyfriend, […] you're already imagining the possible outcomes, that's something I do sometimes, you mentioned you don't have sexual intent in mind, that's great but what about romantic intent, a slippery slope a romantic intent it is, be careful, I don't think you could ever do anything to harm a child, because I can tell you're good people, for now just develop a friendship with well founded boundaries, I wish you the very best for you.

Additional posts which fell under this theme were instances of non-sexual physical contact with YF(s). An example is shown below.

> Quote: "A few days ago I was at her place and as I left she did something that took me by surprise again. I said goodbye to her from across the room and she came over and spread her arms to hug me.. I crouched and hugged her lightly, just my hands light on her upper back..although I would've loved have held her tighter to me, I thought that would not be appropriate at this stage"

Gift giving and receiving were also discussed by several forum posters. Many of the posts explicitly discussed what kinds of gifts individuals would give to their YFs and the types of gifts they would receive in return. Many of these posts emphasize the deep meanings forum posters gave to the items gifted to and received from their YFs.

Quote: "I gave him a couple of gifts I bought for him while I was away, and he loved them, and they were both so thankful. The look on my face when I handed them to him was utterly adorable."

Quote: "A lollipop, given to me by a 8 years old girl. I'll never ever eat it.I told about her before. She was the girl who wrote my name on her name badge.
Her family moved away and I don't see her any more."

Quote: "One special keepsake is a ring my first and most dearly remembers lgf gave me many years ago. I doubt adult her even remembers it anymore, but I do for certain. I have a few things from her, including a hair tie that she used to wear everywhere. I gave the ring to [YF name redacted] this past week before she had to return home, so she would remember how much I love her, and that, no matter what, we're two souls bound together through our love of LGs."

Other posts included within this theme focuses on the frustrations of pedohebephilic individuals either towards their YF(s) or toward society for making the facilitation of child-adult friendships unacceptable and/or difficult to establish.

Quote: "Some other people have said to me to make friends with other LGs but tbh i don't even want to make LG friends anymore because most kids today know what a pedo is and kids and adults just simply being friends together online is now taboo.

Heck a adult just saying hello to a kid is now considered grooming and manipulation which is stupid and it wasn't like this back in the days of the old internet back in like 2007 however nowadays things are different and the current generation of kids hate us have been brainwashed and know what a pedo/MAP is even at a VERY young age because their favorite YouTuber told them about it.

I honestly give up I'm done i hate my life and i don't know if i will ever love another LG ever again she was different and not like most kids today and we were a lot alike which made her so perfect."

Some of the forum posters encouraged others on the forums to continue their friendships with their YF(s) and to continue sharing their experiences with the forum users. Some posters inquired about ways to meet and develop a social relationship with a child so they too could have a YF.

Quote: "I'm very happy for your newfound special friendship, [username redacted]. She obviously is into you as well! I hope you will have the chance to spend more time with her!"

Quote: "I suggest go to the park, find kids with a ball or a puppy and play with them. Show them you are not dangerous, kids love attentions. Before then they will ask you to play with them. Maybe if you see them often parents will invite you to their home, for supper, or something or a birthday party... All this has happen to me, and I'm shyest person ever."

Quote: "Is there anywhere else you could volunteer? Anyplace in the community where you could work with kids, like a library or an after-school program? A daycare? Anything like that? I'm pretty sure I've said this to you before and I will say it a million more times...everyone hears that a person like working with kids and they assume you should be a teacher/work at a school. As though that's the only way to spend time with kids as a job. There are so many more options out there! And to be honest, they're all way more fun than being at a school So this may end up being a blessing."

Other topics included forum posters sharing details of their preferred physical and temperamental attributes of their YFs. Less common were posts that explicitly discussed having and/or engaging in sexual fantasies about their YFs. In the quotes including fantasies below, there is a sense of struggle and challenge of the poster when mentioning the pain they experienced when trying to stop fantasizing, as well as experiences of high levels of anxiety accompanying such fantasies.

Quote: "One party I was lucky enough to attend at her place involved a blow up kiddie pool (always a good feature on any backyard party imo). She wore a one piece swimsuit which was slightly too big and she looked AMAZING as she splashed around giggling with the younger kids. She's so lean and athletic and the material hung a little low on her chest and clung to her backside beautifully and as she climbed in and out I was getting a little flustered and had to go grab a beer to cool off lol.

The quote above highlights risk by not only demonstrating how aroused the poster is becoming, but also it shows the potential and risk of other adults around noticing this individual's focus and attraction to this child given it is likely other adults were around.

Quote: "I adore this girl a but I haven't given myself the permission to truly dive deep into the romantic rabbit hole, where I would start fantasizing about being with her and stuff. That's how I felt towards my niece and now it's a long and painful road to try to get out of this situation. I think I'm making some progression."

Quote: "The problem is that my lust became inflamed and my fantasies multiplied excessively - to the point it was causing me anxiety and impacting my relationship."

The final topic included under the current theme consisted of forum posters discussing coming out/disclosing their pedohebephilic attractions to their YFs. Discussion revolved around poster's choices to either disclose or never disclose their attraction to their YFs and why/how they came to that conclusion. Within this code, there was discussion back and forth between forum posters who thought it was beneficial to disclose to their YF, while other posters urged these individuals to think critically about the act of disclosure and the possible consequences of doing so. Finally, a less common conversation on the forums included in this theme was whether or not forum posters have already reunited or would be willing to reunite with their YFs once they have grown up and are no longer a child.

> Quote: "I could never imagine telling [YF name redacted] the truth about my attractions, even when he grows up. I just wouldn't want to risk damaging his view of me. Does it kill me to have to keep this secret, and not be honest about how I feel about him? Yes. But it's a secret I must keep, for his safety and my safety"

> Quote: "There's a happy ending. Around five years later we met up again, by which time he was at uni and had a girlfriend. My partner and I went out for a few drinks, the four of us. Ironically, my partner is roughly the same age as he is. He was astounded that I'm gay; he always thought, he told me, that I fancied his mum."

Theme 4: "Forced to unfriend her": Role of the social network

The final theme reflects content related to influences one's social network has on allowing, monitoring, or disallowing social interactions with children. There were several forum users who either asked for advice or were given advice from others on the forum in reference to their safety when interacting with YFs. Others discussed how other adults not from the forums expressed concern, caution, and or disapproval of frequent contact with children in a social setting.

> Quote: "That sounds lovely, but I hope you keep your head on your shoulders and don't start saying or doing things that will raise eyebrows. The fallout from being suspected of an attraction or infatuation can be devastating. I just wanted to throw that out there because I have been through it and I don't want to see it happen to anyone else. I know

that you wouldn't do anything harmful, so don't take this as me being skeptical of you yourself."

Quote: "Update so she came back and basically confirmed that her parents didn't like that she was talking with me and they forced her to unfriend me.
She told her parents about me and they changed their minds and think it is okay if she talks to me and if we are friends but her school thinks i am trying to take advantage of her even though i have no bad intentions."

Additionally, some forum posters explicitly stated their awareness of harm to children and commitment to never harm their YF(s) or any children for that matter. At times, this discussion also included awareness of the harm that may come to them should their attraction be discovered by other adults (e.g., loss of employment, possible reporting to authorities, etc.). To mitigate the potential risk of being accused of having an attraction to children or being accused of harming a child, some forum posters shared how they maintain close relationships with their YF's parents. There are even instances where the forum poster insists there is nothing nefarious between them and the child despite their parents or other adults questioning the child-adult relationship.

Quote: "I hate that this has to be said, but I'll say it anyway; no, I'm not going to abuse him, or do anything inappropriate with him, or do anything that has a chance of harming him."

Quote: "I'll have to think about what I should do. I don't want to throw away a good friendship over my overthinking, but I also don't want to end up in a situation where I could make a bad decision. I think establishing firm boundaries is what I should do; or rather, when something crosses a line, making it clear that that isn't what our friendship is about. I could honestly be making a mountain out of a molehill but again this is so new to me, I've never been in this position before."

Quote: "I'm very clear to his mum that I don't want to keep secrets, that I want her to be aware of everything that goes on between us.

Quote: "As far as her parents and school her mom usually takes away her phone at night and sometimes will go through her phone that's how they knew she was talking to me and they told her school and her school tracked her phone and tried to tell her that i was taking advantage of her when i have/had no intention of doing so.
Later on she had a zoom meeting with her parents and school regarding online safety and her parents wanted her to block me so she did and we didn't talk for awhile.
After that she had a talk with her parents about me and she explained to them about how i help her a lot with her mental health and make her feel better on her bad days her parents

later changed their minds and said that it was okay for her to talk to me but the school still disagreed and if her parents didn't comply they would go to the police even though there technically was nothing to charge me with in the first place because we were just having normal non-inappropriate conversations.
After that she gave me her personal email and we began talking through email for awhile but she fell behind on her school work and i haven't heard from her since June 17th […]”

A less common topic of discussion was how some forum posters were aware that having YFs may be risky given how they may be perceived by other adults, but they shared their unbothered demeanor for how others perceive their relationship with their YF.

Quote: “I tell myself to not be shy about being friends with him, because I'm beyond certain that I'm not going to harm him, and if people want to judge me then screw them, I don't care what they think.”

Quote: “Another thing that I thought about that comforted me when it came to showing my girls affection when others are around: no one who's around knows what your relationship is to that girl. When they don't know what the relationship is, they can't really judge whether something is "wrong" or "appropriate". You could be their parent, their sibling, their cousin, their aunt/uncle, a friend of their parents' who they've known since birth...you could be anyone, so, as long as the kid is clearly comfortable, there's no issue.”

Finally, some forum posters discussed how they felt supported by other adults and sometimes the parents of their YF’s regarding their friendship and frequent interactions with children.

Quote: “And what I really can't get over is how eager and easy-going his mum is. She's so chill about us being friends, to the point where she has let us hang out on our own, play online games together and didn't even flinch during the times [YF name redacted] gave me a hug.”

This theme underscores the role that social networks play regarding how pedohebephilic individuals interact with their YFs. It is evident that many of the forum posters are aware of how their social relationships with children would be perceived by others and would even act (i.e., regularly engaging with the child’s parents) in hopes of alleviating any concern or suspicion. In addition, some posters were not focused on the opinions of outsiders and friends and family would caution or warn them to be mindful of how their interactions may be risky or drawn unwanted attention to them and their concealed attraction.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to gain an understanding of why pedohebephilic individuals engage in social relationships with children (frequently referred to as "young friends" within these online communities) and how these individuals conceptualize their social relationships with children. Following the reflexive thematic analysis of 190 forum posts, four themes were identified as: concerns of dynamic changes, emotional congruence with children, challenges and risk of relationships with children, and the role of social networks.

An interesting finding was the ambiguous definition and language used when discussing social relationships with children among pedohebephilic individuals. The author anticipated, to some degree, to be able to find forum posts that clearly distinguished platonic social relationships with children from those that frequently use the term "friend" but includes discussion of more intimate and romantic feelings towards the child. As mentioned, the most common term used to describe a consistent social relationship with a child or children is to refer to them as "young friend (LF)". Throughout data collection and reflexive thematic analyses, the term "friend", did not always refer to a strictly platonic relationship. Several forum posters appeared to use "young friends" as an alternative to terms such as "girlfriend" or "boyfriend" since more times than not the term YF was used in context of sexual and/or romantic attraction. This interesting finding may help provide an answer to research question two which aimed to determine pedohebephilic individuals conceptualize their social relationships with children, such that there is likely more than one way to define social relationships with children. It appears that while some of the responses collected from pedohebephilic individuals expressed strictly platonic feelings for the children in which they interact with socially, other individuals explicitly shared they felt romantic, emotional, and sometimes sexual feelings towards their "young

friend." Clearly the term young friend means different things to different people. An important takeaway for clinicians who work with pedohebephilic individuals is to perhaps take the time to carefully explore the dynamics of these social relationships with their clients.

Comparing the results of the present study to our current knowledge of adult-adult friendships, including intergenerational friendships, it is possible that pedohebephilic individuals seek out children as friends because they themselves are more child-like and have high levels of ECWC. Indeed, the second theme '"Adults are dull": Emotional Congruence with Children' clearly suggests there is a clear overlap between social relationships with children, and emotional congruence. Previous research highlights the lower likelihood of two individuals becoming friends and spending significant time together if there is a generational age-gap (Allen, 1989; Williams & Nussbaum, 2000). Despite these previous findings, it is possible that pedohebephilic individuals that have high levels of ECWC do not feel the effects of intergenerational age gaps, since they themselves feel more child-like and prefer to engage in more child-like behaviours. This concept would also follow the concept of homophily in that because pedohebephilic individuals are more child-like, they seek out social situations and friendships that align with their child-like preferences. This idea of homophily coupled with ECWC among pedohebephilic individuals could explain research question one, which focused on determining a possible reason why pedohebephilic individuals want to have children as friends.

It is possible that these social relationships with children among pedohebephilic individuals can contribute to feeling less socially rejected, especially when accompanied with feelings of rejection and a lack of belonging to one's adult social network. This may result in pedohebephilic individuals gravitating towards having children as friends due to the comfortability and perceived feelings of acceptance that come with these friendships, which is

consistent with the concept of ECWC (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004; Wilson, 1999). As outlined in chapter one and three, social relationships are a crucial part of overall well-being, therefore its possible that having children as friends is likely fulfilling this emotional need for connection, acceptance, and belonging. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that even if this is the function of these relationships, that it is the perspective of the author that it is possible social relationships with children present a risk of harm and more socially appropriate relationships should be encouraged. Should a client disclose they are engaged in a social relationship with a child, clinicians should explore reasons the client feels the need to be friends with a child and assist them in forming and nurturing social relationships with adults where there is no risk to a child.

Finally, although it is difficult to determine the intention of each forum poster when interacting with a child assumed to be their friend, it is the author's perspective that there is evidence of potential grooming behaviours in some of these social situations. An example of this could be when one pedohebephilic individual suggested to another that they "get a dog" if they want to be in closer contact with children since children typically like dogs and this will be an easy way to interact and form a bond with a child. It is even possible that the intent of "grooming" was not present, but given pedohebephilic individuals' interest in children, they may be engaging in a type of "natural progress" that is sometimes seen in adult-adult friendships toward becoming sexual and/or romantic partners. Although it is highlighted that some individuals explicitly state that the relationship is platonic or that is the intent, that there is a real risk for the potential for romantic feelings to develop in the context of these relationships.

Relatedly, researchers examining adult-adult relationships suggest there are a minimum of two types of intimacy, (1) friendship-based intimacy, and (2) passion-based intimacy

(Berscheid, 2010 & Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). These schools of thought have been researched separately and are largely understood as two distinct pathways which could lead to intimacy and romance (Stinson et al, 2022). More recently studies have started to examine the progression from a friendship-based intimacy to a passion-based intimacy, where two adults may develop a friendship and then begin to experience romantic and sexual desire (Diamond, 2003). Some studies have argued that if this progression occurs then the friendship was not truly platonic (Halatis & Christakis, 2009; Kaplan & Keys, 1997; Stinson et al., 2022). Since many of the pedohebephilic individuals posting on the forum shared significant emotional and/or romantic interest in their "young friends", it suggests that these friendships are not truly platonic, at least from the perspective of the pedohebephilic individual. This line of reasoning could also explain why having children as friends could be contributing to distress and may even lead to a desire to offend against a child.

Limitations

There are various limitations in the present study. Given that thematic analysis is flexible, by design, it also leaves room for inconsistencies to be introduced such as potential for a lack of coherence when formulating themes (Nowell et al., 2017). Another limitation of thematic analysis, and sometimes qualitative analysis in general, is that of transparency (i.e., sharing the standpoint of the researcher/coder) and credibility (defined as the accuracy of representation of participant's words by the researcher; Nowell et al., 2017; Tobin & Begley, 2004). To cope with this limitation, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the author disclosed several challenges encountered throughout the analytic process, highlighting at times their struggle with positionally. Braun and Clarke (2006), highlight the importance of noting this social standpoint

especially when representing individuals of marginal and vulnerable groups, and groups to which the researcher does not belong (i.e., such as pedohebephilic individuals in the present context).

Moving on to the type of qualitative data collected in the present study, a noteworthy limitation of online user-generated content is the lack of social cues. This absence of social cues makes it difficult for researchers to fully capture the intended meaning of messages (Smedley & Coulson, 2021). Without fully understanding the intention and meaning of the messages posted describing pedohebephilic individual's social relationships with children, there is the possibility of biases and misunderstandings from the researcher that can influence interpretation of the posts.

Another limitation of collecting forum data is there may be an overrepresentation of negative experiences as some individuals tend to use forums to discuss their feelings or experiences when they are feeling particularly unhappy or distressed (Smedley & Coulson, 2021). Therefore, there may be an inherent bias of the forum users where some issues or themes may be overrepresented while other issues are underrepresented. Furthermore, data collection from two online forums is almost certainly not representative of all pedohebephilic individuals using online forums. For example, there are several dark-web discussion forums and pro-offending forums that were not included in this study, so it is highly likely the list of themes included here is far from exhaustive.

A final limitation is that, despite the author attempting to collect as many forum posts as possible within the allotted timeframe, forums can be the source of data overload (Smedley & Coulson, 2021). It is possible the author may have missed noteworthy threads or posts discussing social relationships with children as it was not possible to review each individual forum user post between January 2021 and October 2022.

Chapter 4 – General Discussion

Both studies presented here highlight important implications for those who provide clinical services to pedohebephilic individuals and even perhaps friends and family members of pedohebephilic individuals. Given that pedohebephilic individuals are, in general, a highly distressed population (Elchuk et al. 2022), they may seek general mental health services to alleviate their distress. In seeking these services, pedohebephilic individuals may disclose their attraction to mental health professionals which has been shown to potentially cause more harm than good (Stephens & McPhail, 2018). Similarly, pedohebephilic individuals who disclose their attraction to friends and/or family, have reported increased distress, particularly if this disclosure is met with a negative response (Elchuk et al., 2022). To mitigate the potential harm caused by disclosing this attraction to children to others, the general population, as well as clinicians, must better understand this attraction and how we can support pedohebephilic individuals to live a fulfilling and offence-free life. Based on the findings presented here, there are a few important takeaways.

Implications

One important finding is that it appears that length of friendship with children is associated with history of child sexual abuse. This finding was mentioned in study one and can be extrapolated from the findings in study two within Theme 3: "Slippery Slope", which described potential risks of engaging in social relationships with children as flagged by other members of the community, as well as non-pedohebephilic individuals. Thus, clinicians should be cognizant that while having a social relationship with a child may not be associated with history of sexual offending, it appears that length of friendship with the child is associated with history of offending. Clinicians should ask additional questions to their clients who disclose such

social relationships (e.g., how long has the friendship been going on? How frequent do you see your young friend?), which would help give the clinician a better sense of the potential of harm to the child. Nonetheless, these findings should be interpreted with great caution given the small sample size of the current study, as well as a lack of understanding of what other factors may be contributing to this result. It is possible that ECWC could be a contributing factor to this interaction, and therefore could be something that clinicians and treatment providers should make note of when seeing clients with pedohebephilic attractions.

Another important take-away from this thesis is the richness of the data provided in Study two. This study is, to the author's knowledge, the first to directly examine discussion posts of pedohebephilic individuals on the topic of having social relationships with children. The data here shows how complex and nuanced these relationships can be and how the experiences of these relationship can differ across individuals even within the same forum. This should highlight to clinicians and treatment providers that each individual and social interaction with children is unique and should be looked at in depth prior to raising concerns about the interaction. This is not to say that social relationships with children should be condoned, but rather, the clinician should spend time exploring and discussing the social contact. Clinicians and treatment providers should work with the individuals to determine the function in these relationships, and what if anything, is lacking in their social relationships with other adults. This may allow the clinician to assist pedohebephilic individuals to nurture and strengthen these adult-adult friendships. It is possible by assisting pedohebephilic individuals with forming and maintaining healthy and fulfilling social relationships with adults, they will be less likely to seek children as a means of social connection.

Future Research Directions

More research is needed to better understand social relationships with children among pedohebephilic individuals. Future research examining social relationships with children would do well to separate offending types into two groups, contact offences and CSEM offences. Given the small number of participants who responded to the questions about sexual offending, both offending types were combined. It is possible that the association (and mediators) are more salient when examining contact offending as opposed to CSEM use. Additionally, future studies should aim to have a much larger sample size so that the statistical analyses and results can be more robust and interpreted with greater confidence; however, gaining a large sample size among this population can be difficult given their wariness to participate and disclose their highly stigmatized attraction.

Another suggestion for future research is a longitudinal study which would help provide better context and sequencing of life events. For example, it would be beneficial to know if a pedohebephilic individual had a social relationship with a child at the same time they offended against a child or if the contact offence happened 10 years prior to engaging in a social relationship with a child. The sequencing of events may prove important in determining exact risk factors for sexual offending. Furthermore, future studies should examine whether sexual offending was committed against the child of which the pedohebephilic individual was engaged in a social relationship. As of right now, we cannot say whether the child/children within these social relationships are at higher risk of being victimized compared to those who are not engaged in these social relationships; however, it would be plausible given we know that time spent with children is significantly correlated with a history of sexual offending (Elchuk et al., 2019).

As a final suggestion for future research, studies may want to examine the exclusivity of the pedohebephilic individual engaging in social relationships with children. It is possible that there may be higher rates of social relationships with children among individuals who are exclusively pedohebephilic compared to individuals who are non-exclusively pedohebephilic. It would also be helpful to determine possible differences between exclusive and non-exclusive pedohebephilic individuals who engage in these social relationships with children as treatment targets for clinicians and treatment providers.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire

KINSEY SCALE ADAPTED

1. Please rate the strength of your sexual interest in prepubescent children (children under the age of 11 years old that you are <u>most</u> attracted to) compared to fully mature adults.
   - ☐ 0 – Exclusively interested in fully mature adults
   - ☐ 1 – Predominantly interested in fully mature adults, only incidentally interested in prepubescent children.
   - ☐ 2 – Predominantly interested in fully mature adults, but more that incidentally interested in prepubescent children.
   - ☐ 3 – Equally interested in fully mature adults and prepubescent children.
   - ☐ 4 – Predominantly interested in prepubescent children, but more than incidentally interested in fully mature adults.
   - ☐ 5 – Predominantly interested in prepubescent children, only incidentally interested in fully mature adults.
   - ☐ 6 – Exclusively interested in prepubescent children.
   - ☐ X – No interest in prepubescent children or fully mature adults.
2. Please rate the strength of your sexual interest in pubescent children (children between the age of 11-14 years old that you are <u>most</u> attracted to) compared to fully mature adults.
   - ☐ 0 – Exclusively interested in fully mature adults
   - ☐ 1 – Predominantly interested in fully mature adults, only incidentally interested in pubescent children.
   - ☐ 2 – Predominantly interested in fully mature adults, but more that incidentally interested in pubescent children.
   - ☐ 3 – Equally interested in fully mature adults and pubescent children.
   - ☐ 4 – Predominantly interested in pubescent children, but more than incidentally interested in fully mature adults.
   - ☐ 5 – Predominantly interested in pubescent children, only incidentally interested in fully mature adults.
   - ☐ 6 – Exclusively interested in pubescent children.
   - ☐ X – No interest in pubescent children or fully mature adults.

KLEIN SEXUAL AGE ORIENTATION

Please rate the following items in terms of the ages of persons you are attracted to. "Adults" refers to people over the age of 17 you are most attracted to. "Children" refers to people under the age of 16 that you are <u>most</u> attracted to.

Question	Past	Present	Ideal
A. Sexual Attraction: To whom are you sexually attracted?			
B. Sexual Behaviour: With whom have you had sex?			
C. Sexual Fantasies: About whom are your sexual fantasies?			
D. Emotional Preference: Who do you feel more drawn to or close to emotionally?			

E. Social Preference: Which age-group do you socialize with?			
F. Lifestyle Preference: What is the sexual identity of the people with whom you socialize?			
G. Self-Identification: How do you label/identify yourself?			

Rating scale for questions A-E – Primary option
1 = Adults only
2 = Adults mostly
3 = Adults somewhat
4 = Both children and adults equally
5 = Children somewhat
6 = Children mostly
7 = Children only

Rating scale for questions F and G
1 Adult-attracted only
2 Adult-attracted mostly
3 Adult-attracted somewhat
4 Adult-attracted and minor-attracted equally
5 Minor-attracted somewhat
6 Minor-attracted mostly
7 Minor-attracted only

SUICIDE BEHAVIOURS QUESTIONNAIRE – REVISED

1. Have you ever thought about or attempted to kill yourself?
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ It was just a brief passing thought
   - ☐ I have had a plan at least once to kill myself but did not try to do it
   - ☐ I have had a plan at least once to kill myself and really wanted to die
   - ☐ I have attempted to kill myself, but did not want to die
   - ☐ I have attempted to kill myself, and really hoped to die
2. How often have you thought about killing yourself in the past year?
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Rarely (1 time)
   - ☐ Sometimes (2 times)
   - ☐ Often (3-4 times)
   - ☐ Very Often (5 or more times)
3. Have you ever told someone that you were going to commit suicide, or that you might do it?
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Yes, at one time, but did not really want to die
   - ☐ Yes, at one time, and really wanted to die
   - ☐ Yes, more than once, but did not want to do it
   - ☐ Yes, more than once, and really wanted to do it

4. How likely is it that you will attempt suicide someday?
  - ☐ Never
  - ☐ No chance at all
  - ☐ Rather unlikely
  - ☐ Likely
  - ☐ Rather likely
  - ☐ Very likely

PAST SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST MINORS

1. Have you been arrested, charged, or convicted for a sexual offence against a child?
  - ☐ Yes (If yes, see below questions)
  - ☐ No (Jump to following questionnaire)

  - a. If yes, what was the sex of the child(ren)? Please check all that apply.
    - ☐ Male
    - ☐ Female
    - ☐ Both
  - b. If yes, what age were you?
    - ☐ Adult
    - ☐ Minor
    - ☐ Both
  - c. If yes, what was your relationship(s) to the child(ren)? Please check all that apply.
    - ☐ Biological child
    - ☐ Step-child
    - ☐ Other related child (e.g., niece, nephew, cousin, biological or half-sister or brother)
    - ☐ Unrelated child acquaintance
    - ☐ Child who was a stranger to you
    - ☐ Unrelated child who was a friend
    - ☐ Other, please specify….____

2. Have you ever been arrested, charged, or convicted for child pornography?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN QUESTIONS

Instructions: When answering the following questions please note that a "young friend" is someone who was 16 years of age or younger when the friendship first started and you were at least 18 years of age or older when the friendship first started. 'Friend' can be defined as a partner in friendship with whom you are in regular contact and/or regularly spend time with.

1. How many young friends do you currently have? ____
2. How many young friends have you had in the past? ____

3. What is the longest friendship you have has with a young friend? _____
4. If you don't have a young friend, would you like one? / Do you wish you had more young friends?
5. I prefer having a child as a friend over having an adult as a friend.
   - ☐ True
   - ☐ False
6. How regularly do you talk to or have social contact with children?
   - ☐ Daily
   - ☐ More than 3 times a week
   - ☐ Weekly
   - ☐ Less than once a week
   - ☐ Less than once a month
7. Do you work with children?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No
8. How do you regularly have contact with children? Please check all that apply.
   1. On the phone
   2. Chatting online
   3. Video chatting online
   4. In person

 (FOLLOW UP slider questions)
(1) On the phone: Daily ----------------Never
(2) Chatting online: Daily ----------------Never
(3) Video chatting online: Daily ----------------Never
(4) In person: Daily ----------------Never

REVISED UCLA LONELINESS SCALE

Indicate how often each of these statements below is descriptive of you.

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1. I feel in tune with the people around me.	1	2	3	4
2. I lack companionship.	1	2	3	4
3. There is no one I can turn to.	1	2	3	4
4. I do not feel alone.	1	2	3	4
5. I feel part of a group of friends.	1	2	3	4
6. I have a lot on common with the people around me.	1	2	3	4
7. I am no longer close to anyone.	1	2	3	4
8. My interests and ideas are not shared by those around me.	1	2	3	4
9. I am an outgoing person.	1	2	3	4
10. There are people I feel close to.	1	2	3	4
11. I feel left out.	1	2	3	4

12. My social relationships are superficial.	1	2	3	4
13. No one really knows me well.	1	2	3	4
14. I feel isolated from others.	1	2	3	4
15. I can find companionship when I want it.	1	2	3	4
16. There are people who really understand me.	1	2	3	4
17. I am unhappy being so withdrawn.	1	2	3	4
18. People are around me but not with me.	1	2	3	4
19. There are people I can talk to.	1	2	3	4
20. There are people I can turn to.	1	2	3	4

INTERNALIZED PEDOPHOBIA SCALE – REVISED FROM THE INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA SCALE

Instructions: The following are some statements that individuals can make about their minor attraction. For these items, "minor attraction" is sexual and romantic attraction to children under the age of 16, and "MAP(s)" is defined as minor attracted person(s). Please read each one carefully and decide the extent to which you agree with the statement, and select the number that best reflects how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

Response format:
    1   Strongly Disagree
    2   Disagree
    3   Neutral
    4   Agree
    5   Strongly Agree

1. Attraction to children is a natural expression of sexuality in humans.
2. I wish I were only attracted to adults.
3. When I'm sexually attracted to a child, I do not mind if someone else knows how I feel.
4. Most problems that MAPs have come from their status as an oppressed minority, not from their sexual or romantic attraction to children per se.
5. Life as an MAP is not as fulfilling as life as a non-MAP.
6. I am glad to be an MAP.
7. Whenever I think a lot about being an MAP, I feel critical about myself.
8. I am confident that my pedophilia does not make me inferior.
9. Whenever I think a lot about being an MAP, I feel depressed.
10. If it were possible, I would accept the opportunity to be attracted to adults.
11. I wish I could become more sexually attracted and romantically attracted to adults.
12. If there were a pill that could change my minor attraction, I would take it.
13. I would not give up being an MAP even if I could.
14. Attraction to children is deviant.
15. It would not bother me if I had children who were MAPs.
16. Being an MAP is a satisfactory and acceptable way of life for me.
17. If I were attracted to adults, I would probably be happier.
18. Most MAPs end up lonely and isolated.

19. For the most part, I do not care who knows I am an MAP.
20. I have no regrets about being an MAP.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

1. I have tried to stop being attracted to children in general.
2. I would like to get professional help in order to change my attraction to children to attraction to adults.

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions:
2. Age: ___
3. The sex you were assigned at birth:
   ☐ Female
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Other, please specify… _____
   ☐ I do not wish to answer this question.
4. The gender you identify with:
   ☐ Woman
   ☐ Man
   ☐ Transwoman
   ☐ Tranman
   ☐ Gender fluid/Gender queer
   ☐ None of these apply to me. I identify as (please specify)… _____
   ☐ I do not wish to answer this question.
   4. Sexual gender orientation: (Note: this question refers to the biological sex of who you are attracted to.)
   ☐ Heterosexual
   ☐ Mostly Heterosexual
   ☐ Bisexual
   ☐ Mostly Homosexual
   ☐ Homosexual
   ☐ Asexual
   ☐ Other, please specify… _____
   ☐ I do not wish to answer this question.
5. Ethnic background:
   ☐ African American
   ☐ Asian
   ☐ Caucasian
   ☐ East Indian
   ☐ First Nations
   ☐ Other, please specify… ____
   ☐ I do not wish to answer this question.

6. Current relationship status:
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Dating
- ☐ Committed relationship
- ☐ Common law or living together
- ☐ Engaged
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Other, please specify… _____

    FOLLOW UP: How long have you been in your current relationship? _____
    FOLLOW UP: I feel very supported by my partner.
    - ☐ Strongly Agree
    - ☐ Agree
    - ☐ Neutral
    - ☐ Disagree
    - ☐ Strongly Disagree

7. Sexual gender orientation: (Note: this question refers to the biological sex of who you are attracted to.)
- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Mostly Heterosexual
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Mostly Homosexual
- ☐ Homosexual
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Other, please specify… _____
- ☐ I do not wish to answer this question.

8. Are you currently employed?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. If yes, what is your type of employment?
- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ Casual
- ☐ Other, please specify…_____

10. If no, when was the last time you were employed?
- ☐ _____

11. What is your highest level of education?
- ☐ No formal education
- ☐ High school diploma
- ☐ College diploma
- ☐ University degree
- ☐ Master degree
- ☐ Doctorate/PhD
- ☐ Other, please specify…_____